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**Ideology and Difference
Equality and Diversity in Contemporary Britain**

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Ideology and Difference: Equality and Diversity in Contemporary Britain

Tom Semlyen

A thesis submitted to King's
College London for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

January 2013

Abstract

This thesis is a contribution towards an explanation of how and why multiculturalism has been successful as a political ideology. My central focus is on the rise of a particular manifestation of multiculturalism in Britain: equality and diversity; more specifically, I trace the evolution of an equality and diversity ideological framework as the latter evolves over time to play a significant role in a wider neoliberal hegemony. I focus, in particular, on the role played by the concept of diversity, and later the concept of cohesion, as a response to the conflicts generated by the promotion of radical, redistributive equality policies in society. In order to carry out this investigation I analyse – both conceptually and empirically – a set of texts taken from seven case study organisations.

Taking the debate between Laclau and Žižek as my theoretical starting point, I go on to provide a historical context for the case study material by looking at the origins of multiculturalism in Britain. I then use two of the case studies to develop a conceptual picture of an equality and diversity framework. Following this I identify, in the remaining case studies, various themes that I consider in detail: the emergence of equality and diversity as a business-led endeavour, the rise of equalities legislation, the relationship between class, social exclusion and diversity, and the more recent focus on cohesion. Throughout these case study chapters the aim is to map the development of equality and diversity, both as a historical phenomenon and as a functioning ideology. The picture that emerges is of equality and diversity as a way of depoliticising redistribution, and this, I argue, is a key factor in explaining its appeal to various groups in society.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The last three decades have seen a remarkable rise to prominence in Britain of two ideas: equality and diversity. More specifically, as a combination (equality *and* diversity) they have come to define a single field of activity that has a firmly institutionalised place within many different areas of society: in politics and law, social policy, the public sector, business, trade unions, art, culture, and so on.¹ A prominent analyst of this development, Judith Squires, has described the promotion of diversity as 'ubiquitous' in the UK (2005: 1), and equality and diversity as the subject of an 'increasingly common public affirmation' (2007: 532). Another well-known writer on the subject, Tariq Modood (2007: 88-9), has similarly noted how what he calls the 'egalitarian acknowledgement of difference' has been making 'steady progress' over the years, advancing across the political spectrum from left to right into the 'mainstream political and managerial consciousness' throughout society.

Take, for example, the workplace. This is where the increasing presence of diversity in society has probably been most visible to the majority of people, with equality and diversity teams now operating in many businesses and public sector organisations. The rise of equality and diversity in this area is illustrated by the 2009 launch of a body responsible for regulating and supporting those working in these teams: the Institute of Equality and Diversity Practitioners.² Two years earlier, a non-departmental public body, the Learning and Skills Council, conducted research into the feasibility of such a body. According to this revealing report the 'enormous proliferation of Practitioners in the field over the last ten years...has been staggering'. What began as a 'handful of practitioners' working in race relations up to the 1980s has now, through the growth of legislation brought in by New Labour coupled with the increasing interest paid to the 'business case for diversity' by the private sector, led to a situation in which: '[i]ndividual specialists and formal bodies in the gender, sexual orientation, faith,

¹ Due to the way in which two concepts have been brought together, I refer to 'equality and diversity' in the singular, as well as simply 'diversity' as a shorthand term to refer to the same field of activity and the ideological formation underpinning it. This means that, unless I say otherwise, the term 'diversity' does *not* refer to the demographic fact of diversity. This last point is more complex than might at first be thought, however, and I will return to it below.

² See the Institute's website for a brief description of, and background to, the organisation (<http://www.iedp.org.uk/About/History.aspx>).

age and disability fields now complement those in the race and ethnicity fields. Individual consultants have combined to form practices or companies working in one or more of these fields'. In short, the 'whole E&D [equality and diversity] concern has become a mandatory part of public and private sector corporate life' (Focus Consultancy, 2007: 10).

1.1 Diversity and Multiculturalism

The rise of equality and diversity is, of course, not limited to Britain but has taken place in different ways and with different intensities in many different national contexts.³ It is also a phenomenon that seems to have outlived closely related terms such as 'multiculturalism' and 'identity politics'.⁴ While multiculturalism is widely considered to have suffered a 'backlash' in the first decade of the new century (see the collection edited by Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010b), and while prominent politicians such as David Cameron (British Prime Minister's Office, 2011) and Angela Merkel (BBC, 2010a) have put forward strong criticisms in the current one, equality and diversity does not appear to suffer from such mainstream criticism. This point is sharpened by examples of centre-left figures who are clearly supporters of equality and diversity, but at the same time critics of multiculturalism. Take, for example, Trevor Phillips: he is a very prominent figure in the equality and diversity field in Britain yet has famously suggested that under the influence of multicultural policies 'we are sleepwalking our way to segregation' (quoted in Hasan, 2010: 1). The significance of this last example is that while David Cameron may hold back from an explicit critique of equality and diversity (in contrast to multiculturalism) for reasons of political prudence, Trevor Phillips is, and continues to be, a firm ideological proponent of equality and diversity.⁵

³ A collection edited by Healy et al (2011) includes chapters on aspects of equality and diversity in Ireland, Scandinavia and Germany, as well as Britain, and Peter Wood (2003) offers a full-length analysis of the rise of diversity in the United States. Also, see Bellard and Ruling (2001) for an analysis of the incorporation of a corporate-influenced 'diversity management' discourse into Germany and France.

⁴ I use the term 'identity politics' as more or less synonymous with 'multiculturalism' – though the latter can be thought of as a later, more institutionalised version of the former.

⁵ He is the former head of the Equality and Human Rights Commission. See also Alibhai-Brown's (2000) rejection of multiculturalism but not equality and diversity.

Is it possible to distinguish between multiculturalism, on the one hand, and equality and diversity, on the other, and thereby justify a critique of the former but not the latter? Both terms clearly signify highly complex and overlapping sets of ideas, policies and institutional arrangements with sociological, economic and political dimensions; this is therefore not an easy question to answer. However, we can say that both agendas clearly share the notion that human differences are important. The basic argument is that societies contain certain differences among people that are to be variously recognised, celebrated, promoted, accommodated and, where necessary, modified. This attention to difference is thought to be important to individuals, communities that gain their identity from these differences (e.g. the Jewish community), and society at large – the container of these differences. Crucially, this 'recognition of difference' necessitates action on the part of the state and other organisations in order to promote this vision against – what is seen as – a now outdated project to construct a single, homogenous national culture. Furthermore this new attention to difference is said to be not a replacement of, or reaction to, the right to equality, but rather an important dimension of the egalitarian and, more broadly speaking, liberal-democratic project.⁶

Many of the policies and practices that follow this central animating ideal, grouped under the terms 'multiculturalism' and 'equality and diversity', remain much the same as well. These are various and may include: measures to promote equality of opportunity between groups such as positive or affirmative action, the funding of distinct group-based facilities and cultural activities, official statements recognising the variety of groups that constitute a political community, changes to educational curricula that seek to make the latter more inclusive, and so on.⁷ Steven Vertovec and Susanne Wessendorf argue that these kinds of policies are continued in much the same way under both agendas: 'uses of “diversity” in today's policy documents are wholly interchangeable with earlier uses of “multicultural”'. That is, “diversity” is the term

⁶ An already cited work, Modood (2007), is a good, succinct and relatively recent defence of this position. Older, often-cited, defences of multiculturalism and diversity include Kymlicka (1995) and Parekh (2000). Bhikhu Parekh is an especially important figure in the development of multiculturalism and equality and diversity in Britain: he chaired the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain (CFMEB, 2000) whose report, of the same name, is another important text in the defence of multiculturalism. I analyse this report in chapter three.

⁷ See Kymlicka (2010: 36-7) for a summary of multicultural policies, many of which could come under the label 'equality and diversity'.

now meant to do much of the work that “multicultural” used to’ (2010a: 19).⁸ In this sense, it would appear that the rise of equality and diversity amid the growing rejection of multiculturalism is simply a rhetorical shift, a shift that hides the continuing ‘recognition of difference’ as well as many of the same policies and practices.

However, while there is certainly substantial overlap between the two agendas there are also important differences of emphasis. Most obviously, if we look at the terms themselves, multiculturalism implies a conception of difference that is specifically cultural rather than referring to the other ways in which human beings can be differentiated from one another.⁹ This emphasis on culture is reflected in public debates about multiculturalism which tend to focus on a clash or supposed clash between majority and minority cultural practices, the consequences of this for national cohesion, and how the state should respond to the issues involved.

More recently, some commentators have suggested a transformation from official multiculturalism to ‘multifaithism’ with religion replacing culture as the source of the differences being promoted (see, for example, Hasan, 2010: 9). Certainly in the last ten years or so it is the specific issue of Muslim integration that has been at the centre of public debates about multiculturalism (this is a central theme in Modood, 2007). These controversies have involved not simply the question of the compatibility of Western culture and Islam, but also, with the attacks on New York in 2001 and London in 2005, issues of security and terrorism. For example, David Cameron launched his recent critique of multiculturalism at a security conference in Munich and drew a connection

⁸ The authors give the example of the Home Office report ‘Improving Opportunities, Strengthening Society’ (2005) in which the term ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘multicultural’ are entirely absent, while ‘diversity’ is mentioned 34 times within a 54 page document (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010a: 18). I look at this report, and the broader community cohesion discourse that it represents, in chapter eight.

⁹ There are a huge variety of such differences – two of the most immediately obvious are age and gender. Although it should be noted that the complexity of the term ‘culture’ is such that both of these characteristics may, in fact, be taken to signify a cultural difference of some kind: we can think of the obvious example of youth sub-cultures, while Iris Marion Young has alluded to a distinct ‘women’s culture’ (cited in Barry, 2001a: 278). I will return to the question of the precise meaning of ‘diversity’ in chapter four. For now, my point is simply to compare the narrower definition of difference implied by multiculturalism with the broader definition of difference implied by diversity.

between, what he sees as, the failure of multicultural policies and the problem of Islamic extremism (British Prime Minister's Office, 2011).

In contrast, equality and diversity promotes an idea of human difference that is, on the surface at least, more about variety and multiplicity than is the case with multiculturalism. In policy terms, the former is associated less with issues surrounding cultural difference and national identity, and more with the relatively mundane problem of implementing equal opportunity policies in the workplace. Equality and diversity is also often associated with the corporate 'repackaging' of equal opportunity policies and the corresponding emphasis on the individual in place of overly-politicised group identities. This is a characteristic feature of diversity that Vertovec and Wessendorf (2010a: 18) in fact point to prior to suggesting, as mentioned above, that in most senses there is a basic homology between diversity and multiculturalism: '[b]ehind many emergent "diversity" policies there is the idea that, rather than treating members of ethnic minorities as ever-representative of bounded collectives, institutions should recognize cultural differences as an individual trait'. This focus on the individual is crucial as it appears to sidestep the question of groups and group-based claims that has consistently dogged the theory and practice of multiculturalism over the years. In its place we get a more anodyne vision of economic subjects made up of a variety of cultural and non-cultural differences.

This difference in tone and emphasis between equality and diversity, on the one hand, and its 'more rambunctious form',¹⁰ on the other, helps to initially mark out the subject area of this thesis. Much of what follows is an examination of the changing nature of equality policies as the idea of diversity begins to take hold – most forcefully within the corporate sector but, as we shall see, in other domains as well. To further clarify, however, I am principally interested in equality and diversity as an *ideological* phenomenon. In other words, while this thesis includes an important historical and institutional component (a point I will return to shortly), my main concern is with the concepts themselves and the role they play in society. In particular, it is the concept of diversity – as the novel partner of the more familiar concept of equality – that is at the centre of this thesis: what does the concept of diversity actually mean, especially when it is

¹⁰ Wood's description of multiculturalism in relation to diversity (2003: 241).

combined with equality such that each term implies the other? How exactly does it relate to the concept of equality, as well as other concepts such as that of cohesion or unity? Can equality and diversity be understood as ideology in the critical sense of the term – in other words, does it help to hide the true nature of reality in some way, or help to reproduce unequal or unjust social relations?

The concept of ideology, of course, adds an extra level of complexity to the thesis. I'll look at some of the issues involved in my use of the term both below and in chapter two. Here, I want to flag-up another important distinction that should be considered when approaching the subject of diversity: its use as a descriptive term and as a prescriptive term. Kenan Malik (2010) has argued for the importance of distinguishing between, on the one hand, the 'lived experience of diversity' and the recognition of a 'society transformed by mass immigration...that is less insular, more vibrant and more cosmopolitan', and, on the other hand, 'multiculturalism as a political process'. For Malik, the latter involves policies that aim to 'manage diversity by putting people into ethnic boxes, defining individual needs and rights by virtue of the boxes into which people are put, and using those boxes to shape public policy'. As is clear from the passages quoted, Malik regards the former as an undeniable good, but the latter as a largely negative phenomenon in society.

Though Malik here contrasts diversity as a social reality with *multiculturalism* as a political project,¹¹ another author already mentioned, Peter Wood, draws a similar distinction in relation to the more specific set of policies that diversity implies in the context of 'equality and diversity' (as outlined above). Wood contrasts diversity as the social variety that has always existed in the United States to the more recent practice that imposes a 'new kind of regimentation that fixes people into artificial categories and dispenses rewards in proportion to the size and political muscle of social groups' (Wood, 2003: quote taken from the back cover). Whether these kinds of criticisms are accepted or not, the

¹¹ See, also, Barry who draws a similar distinction (2001a: 22-3; 293). Stuart Hall (from a less critical perspective) has also distinguished between the adjectival and substantive use of the term, between the 'different cultural communities [that] live together and attempt to build a common life while retaining something of their "original" identity' and the 'problems of diversity and multiplicity which multi-cultural societies throw up' (quoted in Pitcher, 2007: 41).

important point is the distinction itself as this helps in clarifying exactly what it is that is being analysed.

In this thesis I will be seeking to unravel the meaning and social significance of diversity in the prescriptive sense of the term: as a political idea that guides the formulation of a range of policies and institutional arrangements. As I've said above, I will also be following Wood in concentrating on the specific role diversity has played in the reformulation of equal opportunity (and other, similar) policies. However, my approach is more substantially theoretical than Wood's book. At the same time, it is also more empirically-focused than another book by an American writer on equality and diversity: *The Trouble With Diversity* by Walter Benn Michaels (2006). This book tends to use empirical examples merely to illustrate the main critical charge levelled against diversity: that it diverts attention from class inequalities thereby helping to sustain neoliberalism.¹² In contrast, my aim is to develop a more systematic investigation of equality and diversity in Britain and how it has evolved over time, and to bring this together with a theoretical analysis of the key concepts involved. In this sense, while I am in broad agreement with the general critical trajectory of Michaels' analysis, my approach differs in that I treat equality and diversity less as a logically incoherent or normatively wrongheaded political theory, and more as a functioning, yet unstable, ideology, institutionally embedded within a particular society: Britain.

In order to conduct this more systematic historical- and empirically-focused enquiry I have chosen a number of case studies: organisations that reflect a broad range of interests in society and which have clearly had a role to play in the development of equality and diversity in Britain. To be clear though: the objective of the case studies is not to analyse each individual organisation itself and its inner workings, nor is it to develop a sociological description of how equality and diversity policies operate at this level. Rather, the idea is that each organisation provides a kind of institutional reference-point for mapping out and understanding a broader ideological formation. I have therefore used the texts produced by these organisations, from the 1960s to the present day, to produce

¹² It should perhaps be noted that this book is written as a polemic, one that brings some of the arguments made in an earlier, more theoretical, book by Michaels (2004) to a wider audience.

this map. This has involved both the analytical task of dissecting the key concepts that arise in the texts and tracing their interaction, as well as the empirical task of providing a picture of the evolution of equality and diversity over time. The latter task has, in turn, involved looking at the problems that lay behind the emergence of diversity, the solutions the idea offered as an ideological framework,¹³ and the kind of conflicts and tensions that emerge as this framework develops.

Alongside the theoretical questions addressed, then, this thesis is also an attempt to contribute towards our understanding of a particular empirical phenomenon: the rise of equality and diversity in Britain. This empirical aspect is not intended to merely provide a historical context to the theoretical arguments, nor is it meant simply as an illustration of these arguments. In this sense I have tried to follow the advice of Howarth and Stavrakakis (2000: 5) in avoiding the 'twin pitfalls of empiricism and theoreticism'. For these two authors, while theoretical frameworks and concepts are crucial, each case of analysis nevertheless involves not an automatic application of a preconstituted theory but rather an articulation of concepts 'in each particular enactment of concrete research'. An important part of the way in which the empirical feeds into the theoretical in this thesis lies in the specific history of equality and diversity that I have chosen to focus on. As we will see, an analysis of this history helps to refocus some of the theoretical questions that surround the significance of difference in contemporary society, questions more commonly treated – especially in a critical way – in relation to the broader topic of multiculturalism.

1.2 Chapter Outline

I begin by looking at the thought of two influential theorists of ideology: Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek; both have greatly influenced my approach to understanding the world and therefore form the natural starting point for the

¹³ In much of the rest of this thesis I simply use the term 'framework'. This term is designed to denote a relatively small-scale ideological structure – i.e. something with less scope than an ideology in the sense of a 'world view'. I have drawn on Erik Bleich here and his definition of a 'frame' (2003: 26-9). As I have said, I will discuss the concept of ideology and related issues in more detail both below and in chapter two.

thesis. However, Laclau and Žižek are important for a second reason: issues in relation to diversity and multiculturalism have become perhaps the most significant point of divergence between the two thinkers over recent years. Exploring the debate between them helps to bring out some of the philosophical issues that lie behind the critique of diversity. More specifically, I argue that while Žižek's more recent focus on the economy is justified as an alternative to Laclau's conception of discourse, there is in fact quite a significant parallel between the two ontologies. Focusing on this can then help us reformulate some of Laclau's concepts such as myth, antagonism, and dislocation. This is useful as, in my opinion, these concepts are more readily applicable to an empirical analysis of the social world than Žižek's psychoanalytic concepts.

In the following chapter I then provide a broad historical overview of the rise of diversity in Britain by highlighting three key sociological developments: 1) the origins of multiculturalism – focusing, in particular, on its emergence in local council politics in the 1980s; 2) the decline of class as a central reference point in society and the neoliberal policies that helped precipitate this decline; 3) the role that critique has played in the historically dynamic nature of multicultural politics. I do not intend in this chapter to explain the rise of diversity nor to provide a comprehensive historical description of the roots of equality and diversity; rather, the aim is simply to provide a context for the themes that emerge from the chapters that follow. I should add that in this chapter I often refer to 'multiculturalism' rather than 'equality and diversity'. This is because the distinction I have drawn above between the two agendas also has a historical dimension. Equality and diversity, to the extent that it is distinctive, can be seen as something that arises out of and, as a reaction to, earlier multicultural initiatives. Given this, it might perhaps be better to view the relationship not as a case of two distinct, yet overlapping, agendas, but rather as a case of a broader historical movement (multiculturalism) encompassing a variety of smaller sub-trends, of which equality and diversity is one.

Returning to the chapter outline, in chapters four to eight I present and analyse the findings from my case studies. In chapter four I look at two civil society organisations – the Runnymede Trust and the Fawcett Society – that campaign on the issues of race and gender equality respectively. The aim of this chapter

is somewhat different to the following chapters: I conduct a largely conceptual analysis of the texts produced by these two organisations in order to describe the basic ideological framework of equality and diversity. In the following chapters I then describe how this basic model is modified as it is taken up within the other organisational discourses.

In chapter five I look at the corporate-influenced variant of diversity (which, as I've said, is probably the best-known influence on the rise of equality and diversity): 'diversity management'. Taking the texts of an employers' organisation, the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), and an equality and diversity consultancy firm called Schneider-Ross, I trace the rise of diversity as a modification of the traditional equal opportunity policies pursued in the corporate context. Alongside the (already mentioned) emphasis on the individual, rather than the group, as the proper subject of equality policies, I also look at two related ideas that are prominent: firstly, the 'business case' for equality policies in which the latter are presented as profitable to the organisation and not just a legal or moral demand; secondly, the importance of changing the culture of the organisation so as to be more receptive to equality and diversity policies.

Following this, in chapter six, I trace the influence of diversity on the evolution of equality legislation through an analysis of texts produced by the New Labour government. I look at a number of developments such as the broadening scope and radicalism of legislation, and the attempt to tidy up the vast array of different acts in order to present a streamlined, modernised legal framework. Important parallels between this chapter and the previous one emerge: in particular, the link between diversity and a focus on the individual. The changed context however means that here it is the individual as a legal subject of rights, rather than as an economic subject in the workplace, that is most clearly articulated.

In chapter seven the questions raised by the problem of socio-economic inequality, although touched on in the previous chapter, are here dealt with in more detail. I consider two case studies in which this issue is central: the TUC (Trades Union Congress) and the New Labour social exclusion discourse. I

track the rise of equality and diversity in both sets of texts in order to analyse in more detail the relationship between, on the one hand, identity-based inequality¹⁴ and, on the other, socio-economic and class inequality. More specifically, central issues include the decline of class conflict as a visible discursive presence, and the interaction between social exclusion and diversity as two different policy agendas dealing with inequality. In both case studies we see that the relationship between diversity and class inequality is somewhat more complex than might at first be thought, and it is these complexities that I try to bring out.

The last of the case study chapters, chapter eight, looks at the way in which two discourses aim to respond to the problem of conflicts that appear to be caused by the increasing presence of equality and diversity in society. Firstly, I look at the EDF (Equality and Diversity Forum), which was set up as an umbrella body to represent equality and human rights organisations in Britain; the EDF emphasise human rights and other, non-legal, approaches to the problem of conflict. Secondly, I look at the New Labour community cohesion discourse: a modification of the traditional multicultural approach to race relations that emphasises the importance of a shared national identity and shared values among different communities in Britain. The aim here is to describe and contrast these different solutions offered, and to show how equality and diversity, understood as a unified discourse and field of activity, registers and responds to perceived problems that affect it.

In the final chapter I bring the various threads of my argument together – both empirical and theoretical. My aim here is to do more than just summarise the findings of the previous chapters, it is to refine and extend the analysis in a number of ways: 1) by making explicit a process of integration, and the role played by the concept of diversity within that process, that has only been implicit

¹⁴ 'Identity-based inequality' is the term I use to refer to inequality suffered by the various non-class 'minority' groups recognised within equality and diversity discourse: women, ethnic minorities, the disabled and so on. Women, of course, are not technically a minority in the sense that they compose more than half of the population. However, in the context of equality and diversity they can be included under the term as they are treated as a disadvantaged group in much the same way as the other groups mentioned. Conversely, while, depending on the definition, the working class could be understood as numerically a minority, there are significant differences in how they are recognised within the discourse, as I will show in detail in the following chapters. On the discursive difference between class and what I am calling identity-based inequality, see Coole (1996).

in previous chapters; 2) by linking my analysis to contemporary, especially critical, thinking on diversity and multiculturalism, specifying the key points – both substantive arguments as well as hypotheses for future research – that I hope this thesis will contribute to this line of thought; 3) by clarifying the limits of my analysis and the kinds of questions raised that I did not have the space or time to pursue. In the final section I have also added some brief reflections on the future trajectory of equality and diversity in Britain, and the likely impact of the present coalition government.

1.3 Method and Research Design #1: The Critique of Ideology

The overall tradition in which this thesis most obviously sits is that of ideology critique and, more precisely, the critical Marxist tradition, which sees discourses as 'ideological systems of meaning that obfuscate and naturalize uneven distributions of power and resources' with the 'critical task of exposing the mechanisms by which this deception operates' (Howarth, 2000: 4). This tradition is, of course, not as strong as it once was. Most obviously, this is due to the decline of Marxism and the pursuit of a materialist, scientific critique of ruling ideas. If Žižek has helped to resuscitate Marxism in recent times his work is certainly not a return to an orthodox critique of ideology, and, following this, I would not wish to place myself unproblematically in this tradition. Nonetheless, there are three general features of the Marxist critique of ideology that have clearly influenced me in relation to my method.

Firstly, we can distinguish between two elements of ideology critique as an approach to the analysis of ideas: one task is to evaluate whether a particular example of discourse is an ideology in the critical sense of the term i.e. does it help to reproduce inequality or injustice in some way? The second task is to explain, if this is the case, how this mystification, in practice, works. In this thesis I concentrate on this second question. In other words, my focus is less on the question of whether or not equality and diversity serves to 'obfuscate and naturalize' social inequality, and more on uncovering the way that this happens, the precise 'mechanisms' that can account for the success of equality and diversity as a functioning ideological formation.

This less critical-evaluative, more explanatory, approach to the question of diversity helps explain my emphasis on the novelty of diversity as an ideological concept, rather than its connection to pre-existing ideological traditions. This is in contrast to existing critiques of diversity and multiculturalism: Michaels and Malik, for example, have both stressed the similarities between contemporary conceptions of difference and more traditional forms of racial thinking. They argue, in different ways, that diversity gives old-fashioned, essentialised racial differences a new, more acceptable cultural veneer, while the fundamental structure of racial thinking nonetheless remains intact (see Malik, 1996: especially chapter six, and Michaels, 2006: especially chapter one). Brian Barry (2001a: 9-11), to take another example, has argued that multicultural thought sits within a tradition of anti-enlightenment reaction alongside figures such as Burke and de Maistre, while Zizek (1997: 43-4) has placed multiculturalism within the context of capitalist and imperialist ideology. The point here is that the critical method shared by these writers – despite their many differences – is to debunk the progressive appearance of the multicultural appeal to diversity by linking it to a more obviously reactionary tradition. While adopting this approach has undoubtedly generated some very useful results (I believe there is some truth in all of the arguments I've just cited), it does, I believe, leave space for more detailed investigations into what distinguishes diversity from previous, right-wing, ideological traditions.¹⁵

The second aspect of my method that owes something to the Marxist critique of ideology is an emphasis on the historical, dynamic and changing nature of equality and diversity. I am not referring here to the question of how the rise of diversity fits within the broader historical process – this is not a question I deal with in any substantial way in this thesis.¹⁶ Rather, I mean the treatment of this

¹⁵ This is not to suggest that critics of diversity have not also tried to define its specificity in this sense – I will contrast some of these critics' ideas with my own results in the concluding chapter. It is rather to say that, in my opinion, this constitutes a less developed area of critical thought on the subject.

¹⁶ Though it's perhaps worth noting some of the historical factors involved in existing explanations of diversity and the wider development of multiculturalism: neoliberalism (Michaels, 2006); the decline of class politics, the Left and Marxism (Zizek, 2000a; Gitlin, 1995: chapter three; Barry, 2001a: 3-4); from a more positive point of view it has also been placed in the context of the rise of human rights and anti-racism (Kymlicka, 2010: 35-6), and conceptions of social citizenship and integration (Rex, 2004). I also discuss another factor (though very much related to issues of class and

development (the rise of diversity) as itself a historical process. More specifically, as a process in which contradictions and conflicts play a crucial role in driving forward change. In the chapters that follow, then, I am concerned less with the precise periodization of the history that I describe, and more with drawing the links between the signs of instability and tension that emerge at specific points in the texts, and the various developments that I chart. In this sense, throughout this thesis, I approach the relationship between diversity and equality – and, albeit to a lesser extent, cohesion – as a contradictory unity that forms initially as a response to social instability, but which tends to lead to new instabilities as it evolves.

While, as I've said, I will explore some of the theoretical questions regarding the concept of discourse in chapter two, it's worth emphasising a third aspect of the Marxist approach to the critique of ideology that I subscribe to in my approach: the idea that texts and discourses constitute only one aspect of reality. This is in contrast to poststructuralist approaches that see reality as discursively constructed. While, as will become clear in chapter two, I am well aware that for Laclau the concept of discourse is used to mean something much broader than language in the sense of speaking and writing, here I reject this approach and use the term solely in the narrower sense. In this thesis, then, discourses are viewed alongside other dimensions of the social such as the state and the economy, and I look for the ways in which those discourses interact with these other entities, the way they 'reproduce and transform the material world' (Howarth quoting Parker, 2000: 3). In this sense I have taken the texts as both evidence of an underlying historical process that I try to document, and as having an effect on that process itself.

In fact we can go further than the previous sentence and say that the case study texts in this thesis provide the material for *three* dimensions of analysis, dimensions that have been outlined by Michael Freeden as constituting the study of ideology. In a useful review-article on the subject, Aletta Norval (2000: 321) writes that Freeden's 'morphological approach' requires: 'the conceptual analysis of political theorists, the empirical and contextual analysis of the

citizenship) in the conclusion, which may be a fruitful line of future inquiry: the rise, especially post-war, of efforts to redistribute resources and opportunities in response to social inequality.

historian, and an investigation of the morphological patterns that contribute to the determination of ideological meanings'. This is a helpful way of describing the three ways in which I use the case study texts in the following chapters: as a way of teasing out the meanings of the key terms involved, particularly 'diversity'; as source material for a historical analysis of the rise of equality and diversity as an ideological framework; finally, I have also used the texts to analyse the specific contribution of discourse to that rise by locating the way in which the texts themselves have structured the semantic field and thereby helped to produce ideological meanings.

In a broader sense (as mentioned above) the aim has been to combine the theoretical and empirical in approaching my subject-matter. In other words, I have attempted to traverse the space somewhere between an analytical study of the central concept of diversity – and related terms that appear within the texts (equality, cohesion, identity etc) – and an empirical study of those concepts at work in particular organisations, over time. Of course, there is a danger here of falling between both an analytical and an empirical study without producing a sufficient version of either. I think this risk is worth taking though because, if successful, my approach should in fact do the opposite: contribute to both types of understanding by highlighting the important relationship between ideological concepts and their historical and institutional context. Again, we can look to Michael Freeden's approach to the study of ideology and, specifically, how it should be distinguished from a purely political-theory approach. According to Norval (2000: 322), Freeden sees the analysis of ideology as a 'focus on the patterns, continuities and discontinuities political thinking displays, and the manner in which they shape what is politically possible. Intellectual effort should not be aimed at perfecting reality through thought-practices that distance one from it, but should aim to interpret its intricacies'. Freeden's approach therefore 'seeks to bridge the gap between, on the one hand, concrete explorations of ideologies, which have tended to be insufficiently analytical, and, on the other hand, theoretical treatments of ideology, which are silent about the differences in the nature and forms of concrete ideologies'. This is, I believe, a good description of the approach that I adopt here.

1.4 Method and Research Design #2: The Case Studies

In relation to how I have selected the texts that would support such an analysis, I should say firstly that I have chosen a multiple case study approach. As has been pointed out, a case study has the advantage of allowing in-depth study of a particular phenomenon. In this thesis this approach has enabled me to gain an insight into the way in which equality and diversity has developed in interaction with specific organisational goals in a way that a more general, across-the-board, approach wouldn't have. The disadvantage, however, is that wider generalisations cannot be drawn from a case study (Burnham et al, 2008: 63-5). Taking multiple cases is therefore an attempt to correct this by combining relatively in-depth studies of particular organisations with a broader picture of the varied social locations in which equality and diversity has had an impact. Even so, given the limitations of time and space I have had to be as cautious as possible in drawing general conclusions from the evidence that I have collected here. One function of the concluding chapter is to suggest some more tentative ideas that have emerged from my research, ideas that would require more empirically detailed research to corroborate them than I was able to undertake here.

In deciding which organisations to look at I aimed to ensure a varied selection by choosing from three areas of society: the state, the economy and civil society. I felt that seven organisations constituted about the right balance referred to in the previous paragraph: allowing a relatively in-depth look at each organisation while, at the same time, enabling a wider picture to emerge. The New Labour government was the obvious choice in relation to the state, but as there was such a wealth of material here – with a number of different strands of policy in which equality and diversity has been relevant – I accordingly treated it as three separate case studies (as described in the chapter outline above). In relation to the economy, the CBI and TUC represent employers and employees respectively and therefore provided a useful contrast, while Schneider-Ross, for their part, have a relatively strong presence as an equality and diversity consultancy company – most notably writing (at least what they claim is) the first book in Britain to argue for a diversity management approach to equal opportunities. Representing civil society, the Runnymede Trust and the Fawcett

Society are both prominent campaigners against the two types of inequality that have probably had the most politicised presence in society: race and gender respectively. Finally, the EDF, as an organisation, represents a unique attempt to bring an element of cohesion to a bewildering variety of NGOs (non-governmental organisations) in the field and therefore also seemed a good choice in relation to this area of society.

In general I tried to ensure that while interesting, the case study texts would be fairly representative of the wider equality and diversity discourse that they inhabit. In other words, while I've picked organisations from a variety of social locations my focus was squarely on the mainstream version of the discourse and not more radical or oppositional currents within it – though I do highlight the existence of these in the course of my discussion of the texts. It is also worth saying that with limited time and space there were, of course, many organisations that would have undoubtedly made useful case studies that I could not include. In particular, one key omission that should be mentioned is the previously existing equality commissions – the CRE (Commission for Racial Equality), the gender-focused Equal Opportunities Commission, and the Disability Rights Commission – as well as the single overarching commission into which they have been merged: the EHRC (Equality and Human Rights Commission). One reason for this – apart from simply the limits of time and space – is that, as non-departmental public bodies, they fell somewhere between civil society and the state, and these two areas of society were already represented in my case study choices.

I should also add that, in relation to the state, I have not included any local councils despite the fact that this is the level at which equality and diversity policies are often administered. It should be kept in mind that my focus in this thesis is on equality and diversity as a relatively recent ideological phenomenon; I therefore felt that central government would be a better place to look for developments, to the extent that it is the latter that tends to provide the broader thinking behind the implementation of policies at a local level. However, as I have said, I do look briefly at the earlier local council policies of the 1980s in chapter three: an example of the reverse process in which novel ideological

trends appeared first at the local level, and were only later taken up by the government.

Once I had selected the organisations to study I then chose from a number of different types of text produced by each organisation: reports were the main source of information, but I also looked at books, pamphlets, speeches by key figures within the organisation, website content, and so on. Bearing in mind the different dimensions of the analysis of ideology outlined above and the number of case studies, I felt that a largely qualitative analysis of these materials was sufficient to provide the results that I required.¹⁷ With this in mind, my aim was to take a representative sample of texts from each organisation rather than a fully comprehensive selection. This meant looking at the different types of source just mentioned, as well as texts from different periods in the history of each organisation. I also made an effort to include, in my sample, different voices within each organisation, in order to bring out any internal tensions. While, it must be said, most of my case studies were relatively consistent in this sense, this approach produced some useful results in relation to the TUC where, as we will see, there are some significant differences over the desirability of a 'diversity approach' to equality.

I should also mention the fact that I analyse each individual case study as a single organisational discourse in a broad sense. By that I mean that I include as 'Fawcett texts' or 'EDF texts' pieces commissioned or produced by that organisation but not written by them, as well as talks at conferences by people not from the organisation in question. As I've said above, my primary aim in this thesis is to use the case studies to gain a picture of a broader social development, not to gain an in-depth understanding of the organisations themselves. With this in mind, I've treated each case study more as a reference-point within a wider discourse, representative of overlapping trends within that field, rather than as a unique voice.

Finally, I should also mention the time-frame I've chosen from which to select the texts: the 1960s (for those case study organisations that existed at that time) to 2010. The 1960s marks the beginning of significant efforts to legislate

¹⁷ For an example of a quantitative analysis of equality and diversity discourse, see Oswick (2011).

against race and gender equality and is therefore a good place to begin in charting the rise of equality and diversity – bearing in mind the important role played by legislation in that development. Equally, the New Labour government has been influential in pushing this legislation to the heights of the 2010 Equality Act, as well as generally giving unprecedented attention, for a government at least, to promoting the equality and diversity agenda in British society. 2010, which marked the fall of this government, therefore seemed a natural end-point for the period under study.

Chapter Two: Zizek, Laclau and Antagonism

There is no doubt that Slavoj Zizek's work has had a huge impact on contemporary thought. His use of Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts, such as fantasy, jouissance, the real and so on, has produced a sophisticated model of subject-formation, which, as Vighi and Feldner (2007a) make clear, challenges both the classical Marxist critique of ideology and the poststructuralist reduction of ideology to discourse. This theory revolves around the centrality of the Lacanian real and the traumatic impact of a failure of our symbolically structured reality to which ideology constitutes a response, literally producing reality through the structuring of images and representations that 'suture' and make complete, and thereby 'liveable', an always-threatened symbolic order. This introduction of the real means that ideology can be understood in a critical capacity – i.e. it is a social phenomenon that can be criticized for its maintenance of a particular social order through its obfuscation of the cracks and fissures of that order (unlike in poststructuralism, it might be argued, where ideology is replaced by a concept of discourse that simply describes the fact of our symbolically-mediated world). However, it differs from the Marxist critical account by designating the non-ideological, from which a critical purchase on ideology is made possible, in negative rather than positive terms. As Zizek (1989: 49) sums up the difference in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*: 'in the predominant Marxist perspective the ideological gaze is a *partial* gaze overlooking the *totality* of social relations, whereas in the Lacanian perspective ideology rather designates a *totality set on effacing the traces of its own impossibility*'.¹⁸

However, while there is a substantial literature assessing the theoretical foundations of this project,¹⁹ there has been much less attention to the question of the potential utility of Zizek's theory for an empirically-minded analysis of ideology (as well as society and politics more generally). This is no doubt partly due to the fact that, as John Thompson (1984: 232) points out, ideology tends to be a subject more commonly approached on the theoretical rather than the empirical level. However, I think it would be fair to say that the problem also lies

¹⁸ Emphasis in the original – this will always be the case in this thesis unless otherwise stated.

¹⁹ See, for example, Vighi and Feldner (2007b) and Sharpe (2004).

at the level of Žižek's thought itself. The two, connected, issues in this respect are: a) his central concepts are psychoanalytic and work, not done by Žižek, is involved in translating them into usable concepts for the properly social field (this criticism is made by Ernesto Laclau, 2004: 315); b) his general approach is too formal so that while Žižek criticizes those approaches that substantialise society – on the grounds that the latter are unable to come to terms with the 'traumatic kernel' of social antagonism (something that both Marxism and poststructuralism are, in their different ways, guilty) – he fails to answer how we should go about analyzing actually-existing 'substantial' societies (this criticism is made of the psychoanalytic approach to ideology more generally by Aletta Norval, 2000: 345-6).

My aim in this chapter, then, is to try to correct this by developing some concepts from Žižek's thought that will be more helpful in analysing a concrete phenomenon: multiculturalism and, more specifically, the ideological framework underpinning the equality and diversity agenda in contemporary Britain. However, the argument I will make in order to do this involves elements of both Žižek and Laclau's respective ontologies. If, on the one hand, Žižek's concept of class antagonism is at the heart of my theoretical approach, it is Laclau who has developed concepts more applicable to understanding the social and political field, concepts that have been utilised in numerous empirical studies.²⁰

With this in mind, this chapter is split into two parts. In the first part, I look in more detail at the concept of antagonism at the heart of both Laclau and Žižek's social ontologies. In order to make sense of Žižek's move to an emphasis on *class* antagonism, I suggest, what I believe is, a useful homology between discourse theory and the Marxist tradition in terms of the idea of a social form or logic that moves from being applicable to a particular region or set of social practices (language in Laclau, the economy in Žižek) to having a more universal function as a way of conceiving of the social totality. This homology allows us to understand not only Žižek's critique of discourse theory, but also what Žižek's critique might gain from discourse theory in the task of elaborating concepts more suitable to empirical analysis. In the second part I focus on the task of deriving these concepts. The key terms I take from Laclau's work are: 1) the

²⁰ See, for example, the collection edited by Howarth et al (2000).

distinction between dislocation and antagonism or struggle; 2) myth and social imaginary; 3) the logics of equivalence and difference. All these terms have to be reworked in the context of the different Zizekian starting-point of class antagonism, though in this chapter I will concentrate largely on the first two sets of concepts listed here and leave the third set to the concluding chapter.

A final point before I begin: my aim here is not to provide a full elaboration or assessment of Laclau or Zizek's thought. A proper study of either thinker, or indeed a full treatment of the philosophical questions that I touch on in this chapter are beyond its scope.²¹ What I have tried to do instead is pursue – in a far more single-minded manner (but, I should add, as rigorously as possible) – a particular line of thought that emerges from the dialogue between the two thinkers, a line of thought that I believe can provide some useful concepts for analysing the particular phenomenon under investigation. I have not therefore attempted to defend their thought directly from one of the more obvious criticisms: that their shared emphasis on contingency and subjectivity comes at the expense of a realist conception of social structure. While Zizek's criticisms of 'discursive idealism' clearly suggest a move in the direction of realism, I have had to largely sidestep this complex issue.²²

2.1 Class Antagonism

I will begin with Laclau's key concept: antagonism.²³ As he uses the term, it is more than simply a way of conceptualising political struggles, it pertains to the very core of social scientific enquiry: the constitution of objectivity itself. As Thomas Brockelman puts it: antagonism

does not point to the 'inevitability of struggle' in a fashion pushing us in the proto-fascist direction of Schmitt and social Darwinists but to a radical heterogeneity. The Other can never be reduced to an other, can never be only a particular being. Being

²¹ Along with those books already cited on Zizek, see Torfing (1999) and Smith (1998) for full-length studies of Laclau's thought.

²² See Callinicos (2006: 182-96) for a detailed discussion of this subject.

²³ I refer to Laclau alone in this thesis – apart from where specific references are made to works authored jointly with Chantal Mouffe – not to discount her contribution, but rather because it is Laclau who has had the more sustained dialogue with Zizek.

itself is punctured by non-being and it is this 'punctuation' at the location of the term representing the whole that is the true 'antagonist' both in *Hegemony* and in Žižek's understanding. In other words, the *truth* of society is that its identity *does not exist*. As Laclau himself puts it, the point of antagonism is the 'impossibility of Society' (2003: 189).

The idea, then, is that antagonism points 'beyond the positivity of the social'²⁴ and is part of a larger poststructuralist project that, as Alex Callinicos (2006: 116) puts it, 'sees attempts to suture social relations into a closed totality constantly subverted by the inherent tendency of signification to exceed itself and thereby to escape all attempts to limit it'. Laclau's specific target within this broader intellectual movement is, of course, Marxism. The latter representing a good example, for him, of the way in which antagonism might be said to have been 'domesticated' in classical modernist epistemologies – that is, reintegrated within a rationally mastered totality revolving around objective laws of history and formal contradictions that do not threaten the basic integrity of society.²⁵

Now, the key task of this chapter is to establish the precise difference between Laclau's concept of antagonism as outlined above, and the very different way in which Žižek conceives of it in his later work. One way of approaching this question, and therefore the complex debates surrounding this concept, concerns the ambiguity of its meaning in *Hegemony*: as Thomassen (2005: 635) puts it, antagonism is 'supposed to both prevent the fullness of identity and arise from the failure of fullness'. Žižek (1990) links his Lacanian criticism of the same ambiguity to Laclau and Mouffe's inadequate theorisation of the category of subject as simply a dispersion of subject positions. For the latter, the subject exists only as a discursively constructed subject-position whose fullness within a system of differences is threatened by the establishment of an antagonistic other and reconstituted on the basis of chains of equivalence – this is antagonism in the weaker sense. For Žižek (ibid: 250-2), on the other hand, the more radical potential meaning of antagonism is that it designates not simply

²⁴ This is the title of chapter three of *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001) – I will refer to this book simply as *Hegemony* from now on.

²⁵ 'Marxism is not only a discourse of negativity and the opaqueness of the social, it is also an attempt – perfectly compatible with the Enlightenment – to limit and master them... It is from this mastery of totality that the moment of negativity loses its constitutive and foundational character: it shone for just a brief moment in theoretical discourse, only to dissolve an instant later into the full positivity which reabsorbed it' (Laclau, 1990: 94-5).

the antagonistic other that threatens your identity as discursive subject position, but rather pertains to the blocked nature of the subject before its subjectification – the Lacanian barred subject. Here the antagonism of the threatening other is simply a discursive manifestation of the subject's own inherent self-blockage – antagonism in the 'real', Lacanian sense.

While Laclau welcomed Zizek's critique and reformulated the concept of antagonism by distinguishing dislocation as the limit of objectivity from antagonism as a discursive response to this dislocation (Laclau, 1990), it would nonetheless be fair to say that problems remain, that it continues to have an 'ambiguous character' in his writings (Thomassen, 2005: 637). Part of the problem is that, as Brockelman (2003: 189-90) indicates, Zizek's critique points to more than a terminological problem. Rather, the concept of antagonism in its stronger sense 'entirely subverts the anti-essentialism and conventionalist historicism of *Hegemony* and subsequent texts'; or, to put this another way, the 'problem with "subject-positions" is by no means accidental to the approach of *Hegemony* as a whole'. The basic problem is that the project of a radical and plural democracy and the post-Marxism that *Hegemony* introduces relies, at its core, on a plurality of different antagonisms within the social – i.e. different possible points of rupture as against the 'oneness' of Marxism and class. However, it is easy to see that this reintroduces the possibility of society as the 'container' of these different antagonisms, a non-antagonistic space through which they can relate to each other as a plurality of different antagonisms prior to their overdetermination. As Brockelman puts it, continuing his description of Zizek's critique:

Hegemony remains beholden, argues Zizek, to an Althusserian vision of the subject, one which conceives of society as constructed of various 'subject-positions' each of which brings its own 'point of view' on political matters. Such a vision of the political, however, implicitly already *substantializes* society – suggesting a master 'viewpoint' of the social itself, a viewpoint from which all the discourses of the 'subject-positions' are exposed as limited and ideological.

For Zizek, on the other hand, the concept of antagonism 'disallows the constitution of society as substantial' (ibid: 190).

The key concept here is that of *form*. What Žižek (and Brockelman in his account of Žižek's position) are suggesting is that Laclau's concept of antagonism lacks a certain radicalism when it comes to the way in which it affects form in relation to society as the object of investigation. In other words, social forms continue to be successful in some way despite Laclau's focus on their 'impossibility'. In this chapter I want to argue that a useful way of conceptualising this difference is the distinction between the *instability* and the *failure* of form. While both Laclau and Žižek argue that a materialist theory depends on the negativity that affects form, this can be understood in two different ways: on the one hand, as a result of this negativity that affects form, the identity of elements are subject to a constant instability or indeterminacy, a constant displacement through which form as something fully successful is forever 'out of reach', so to speak.²⁶ On the other hand, we can understand this negativity as a more radical *failure* of form, as a failure of the success of form in providing an identity for particular elements. In the first, form is forever out of reach of the particular; in the second, form is stained or marked by particularity.²⁷ This way of putting it would also be a useful way, I believe, of characterising the disagreement in relation to the subject that I've summarised above: on the one hand, the subject of poststructuralism is one that is subject to the instability of discourse, the endless 'play of signifiers' forever producing new subject-positions; on the other hand, the Lacanian subject is subject to the 'real' – a basic failure of discourse or the symbolic, around which the latter is structured.

While, as far as I know, it has not been put in exactly these terms (the distinction between the instability and the failure of form), this nonetheless aims to capture a fairly standard distinction between poststructuralism and the psychoanalytic critique led by Žižek – in the sense that the latter introduces a more radical negativity at the heart of being understood as formally

²⁶ The 'form and essence of objects are penetrated by a basic instability and precariousness, and...this is *their most essential possibility*' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1990: 109).

²⁷ This difference is, of course, often described by Žižek using Hegelian terminology, such as the concrete universal. He has also – in line with this – accused Laclau of being a secret Kantian. For example, in one of his more recent books, Žižek (2008: 294) writes that it is 'Laclau who is here (like Kant) all too naive in his critical stance, namely, in his assertion of the irreducible gap between empty universality and its distorted representation. From my Hegelian standpoint, this gap can be overcome. How? Not through the arrival of an adequate direct presentation of the universal, but so that *distortion as such is asserted as the site of universality*: universality *appears* as the distortion of the particular'.

constructed.²⁸ However, what concerns me in this chapter, as I have said, is how to go about generating some useful concepts through which we can understand concrete ideological formations, and I am not convinced that psychoanalytic concepts are particularly useful here. A related issue is the problem of deriving the categories that Žižek is increasingly dependent on, such as class and capital, from this more radical conception of negativity: why should the psychoanalytic critique of poststructuralism lead to a rehabilitation of these Marxist categories?²⁹ The best way forward I believe is to shift the starting-point in relation to the characterisation of the form that the different types of negativity affect. Poststructuralism and psychoanalysis both conceive of social form in terms of language or the symbolic so that the difference between Laclau and Žižek is often formulated, as I've suggested, as the difference between a less radical instability of discourse and its more radical failure.³⁰ What I am suggesting instead is that we rethink this difference as the instability of the commodity-form versus a more radical failure of this form. It is at this point, then, that my characterisation of the difference between the poststructuralist and psychoanalytic conceptions of negativity as the difference between the instability and the failure of form gains its pertinence – it allows us to re-read the difference between the thinkers in relation to the commodity-producing structure of capitalism rather than in relation to the system of signs in discourse theory.

In order to justify this shift of emphasis from the symbolic to capital, we need to take a slower journey from one to the other than is usually the case with Žižek, who tends to move more rapidly between them. First of all we need to look more closely at Laclau's concept of discourse: discourse is the 'primary terrain of the constitution of objectivity as such', it is not restricted to language or linguistic practices such as speech and writing, but is instead 'any complex of elements in which *relations* play the constitutive role' (Laclau, 2005: 68). The key point concerning Laclau's concept of discourse is this stress on the formal relations by which objects are constructed and the concomitant rejection of a

²⁸ See Daly (2009) for more on this.

²⁹ Laclau (2005: 235) has described this feature of Žižek's thought as 'two incompatible ontologies: one linked to psychoanalysis and the Freudian discovery of the unconscious, the other to the Hegelian/Marxian philosophy of history'.

³⁰ It should be pointed out that this is the case even in Žižek's writings to the extent that he often equates the social with the Lacanian symbolic, while, at the same time, putting forward an idea of capital as the real of our times – causing confusion that Laclau (2000a: 291-2) has rightly picked up on.

discursive/extra-discursive distinction. There is no 'beyond the play of differences, no ground which would a priori privilege some elements of the whole over the others' (ibid: 69). In response to the often-made criticism that this theory involves an idealistic reduction of social reality to language made by a number of authors (see, for example, Geras, 1987), Laclau has put forward the following argument many times: that to say that society is discursively constructed does not in any way involve reducing everything to language. Rather, what is involved is a practical ontology in which linguistic and non-linguistic elements are articulated into relational ensembles, and it is through this process that those elements – from the most abstract concepts to brute material objects – gain their identity (a process that Laclau and Mouffe call the 'social production of meaning', 2001: 107).

However, the key question to raise in relation to this critique and counter-critique of discourse theory is this: if we accept the idea of a practical ontology in which elements (linguistic and non-linguistic) come together in the production of a structured formation, what, then, is the nature of the continuing link with language that is implied by the use of the term 'discourse'? In a critical reader on Laclau, David Howarth (2004: 265) has described Laclau's use of the term 'discourse' as relying on the 'trope of catachresis':

That is to say, he 'creatively misapplies' the concept of discourse to encompass all dimensions of social reality and not just the usual practices of speaking, writing, and communicating. This displacement is, of course characteristic of a number of different approaches to social and political analysis. One has only to think of the way in which rational choice theorists model social and political behaviour on the behaviour of firms and private markets.

However, while this point may help orientate discourse theory within the range of different approaches to social and political analysis, it does not really help in defending discourse theory against critics of the approach, as rational choice theory, to take Howarth's example, can be criticised precisely because it models behaviour on a set of untenable economic assumptions. Indeed, Howarth himself follows the preceding passage by raising the 'key issue': '*how far can we extend Laclau's resultant analogy between language and society*' (ibid: 266). Laclau's (2004: 323) response to this question is worth noting in full, he writes:

let me say that I have never established an 'analogy' between language and society, so I do not think it is really a pertinent question such as '*how far* we can extend Laclau's resultant analogy between language and society'. What I have said, which is entirely different, is that social practices – language included – are structured by logics of equivalence and difference; that the discursive model is not a linguistic one which should be opposed to a certain 'social' constituted through a different paradigm.

In this sense the answer to the question I pose above is not simply that the study of language provides certain useful tools and simplifying assumptions that can help in social and political analysis; rather, there is a much deeper ontological claim: that language and society share exactly the same *formal* structure.

It is important then not to get sidetracked by the question of linguistic reductionism or determinism at the level of particular social practices; rather, it is social *forms* that are characterised as fundamentally linguistic. This is why one of the key developments in the emergence of discourse theory is the formalisation of linguistics by the Copenhagen school, a point made by both Laclau and Jacob Torfing. Laclau (2001), for example, argues that this linguistic formalism 'by breaking the link between linguistic categories and the substance that we call speech, made possible the extension of structural analysis to the ensemble of social life and opened the way to a generalised semiology'. Similarly, Torfing (1999: 89) writes that 'if linguistic analysis is no longer necessarily attached to a particular phonic or semantic substance and thus becomes an analysis of pure forms, there are no limits to the application of the abstract schemes of linguistic analysis'. We might put the point like this: 'language' in discourse theory names not specific practices (speech, writing etc), but a social form that shifts from being applicable to a particular set of practices, a particular region in society, to one that encompasses *all* social practices. It names a kind of universal, mediating form through which any element can be understood.³¹

³¹ This does not of course mean that Laclau thinks that material objects do not *exist* outside this set of formal relations. As Laclau and Mouffe (1990: 100-1) note in their reply to Geras: the 'fact that a football is only a football as long as it is integrated within a system of socially constructed rules does not mean that it thereby ceases to be a physical object. A stone exists independently of any system of

What, then, are the consequences of this understanding of a universal social form as linguistic? At this point I should perhaps repeat the note of caution expressed above: we have clearly entered into very complicated philosophical territory, raising questions about form, society and language that take us far beyond the scope of the discussion here. As I've said, I am concerned to merely establish a useful way of understanding the differences and similarities between Laclau and Žižek's respective ontologies. With this in mind, I want to, rather than answer the question posed as such, simply establish an important parallel between the two theorists in relation to language, on the one hand, and the economy, on the other. We need to now, then, turn to Žižek's focus on the latter.

Žižek follows the Marxist tradition, and especially the Western Marxist strand of that tradition, in seeing the commodity-form as key to understanding contemporary societies. In his dialogue with Butler and Laclau he argues that

one of the great and permanent results of the so-called 'Western Marxism' first formulated by the young Lukács is that the class-and-commodity structure of capitalism is not just a phenomenon limited to the particular 'domain' of economy, but the structuring principle that overdetermines the social totality, from politics to art and religion (Žižek, 2000a: 96).

In *The Parallax View* Žižek (2006: 56) describes this structure as 'a kind of socio-transcendental *a priori*, the matrix which generates the totality of social and political relations'. Žižek's focus on the commodity-form is, then, analogous to Laclau's focus on the sign, in the sense that the commodity-form for Žižek is not tied to a particular region, or particular set of practices, but one through which all social practices are subsumed and can be understood. One useful phrase for this, given by Žižek (2010: 198), is that the commodity-form becomes, in modern capitalist societies, a 'historically specific transcendental *a priori*'.

social relations, but it is, for instance, either a projectile or an object of aesthetic contemplation only within a specific discursive configuration'.

In *History and Class Consciousness* Lukacs (1968: 85) writes of the 'qualitative difference between the commodity as one form among many regulating the metabolism of human society and the commodity as the universal structuring principle'. He goes on to describe what could be understood as a formalisation of economics as a crucial condition of this state of affairs – analogous to the formalisation of linguistics in relation to the development of discourse theory:

in the first place, the mathematical analysis of work-processes denotes a break with the organic, irrational and qualitatively determined unity of the product.

Rationalisation in the sense of being able to predict with ever greater precision all the results to be achieved is only to be acquired by the exact breakdown of every complex into its elements and by the study of the special laws governing production...The unity of a product as a *commodity* no longer coincides with its unity as a use-value: as society becomes more radically capitalistic the increasing technical autonomy of the special operations involved in production is expressed also, as an economic autonomy, as the growing relativisation of the commodity character of a product at the various stages of production (ibid: 88-9).

This form then extends, just as in discourse theory, to all social practices:

Reification requires that a society should learn to satisfy all its needs in terms of commodity exchange. The separation of the producer from his means of production, the dissolution and destruction of all 'natural' production units, etc., and all the social and economic conditions necessary for the emergence of modern capitalism tend to replace 'natural' relations which exhibit human relations more plainly by rationally reified relations. But this implies that the principle of rational mechanisation and calculability must embrace every aspect of life...Only when the whole life of society is thus fragmented into the isolated acts of commodity exchange can the 'free' worker come into being; at the same time his fate becomes the typical fate of the whole society (ibid: 91).

Lukacs continues: the 'atomisation of the individual is, then, only the reflex in consciousness of the fact that the "natural laws" of capitalist production have been extended to cover every manifestation of life in society' (ibid: 91-2).

We can summarise the analogy like this then: for both Laclau and Žižek, a social form becomes detached from a particular region of society (language and the economy) and comes to denote the fundamental ontological structure of the

social world – a structure that includes elements both from the region itself (i.e. linguistic and economic practices) and from outside that region. Moreover, the development of both of these ontologies is linked to the rise of modern capitalism. For Žižek, this is obviously the case. However, it should also be noted that the same is true for Laclau: he and Mouffe note that the 'centrality we give to the category of "discourse" derives from our attempt to emphasize the purely historical and contingent character of the being of objects', but that this is not a 'fortuitous discovery which could have been made at any point in time; it is, rather, deeply rooted in the history of modern capitalism'.³²

There is nothing new in suggesting a link between language and a commodity-economy as systems of difference and equivalence – indeed Laclau and Mouffe, themselves, draw this parallel in *Hegemony* (2001: 146). What is new, perhaps, is to emphasise this homology in relation to Laclau and Žižek's differing ontologies; however, this to me seems to be a productive way of reading Žižek. On the one hand, it suggests a defence of his focus on the economy (and the related concepts of capital, class etc) in a way that avoids the criticism of economic reductionism or determinism by utilising the way in which discourse theory itself avoids this charge in relation to language. For example, we could replace 'language' with 'economy' and 'discursive' with 'capitalist production' and the passage from Laclau (cited above) would make a good defence, I believe, of Žižek's focus on the economic: what Žižek could be said to claim is that (paraphrasing Laclau, 2004: 323) 'social practices – economic included – are structured by logics of equivalence and difference...the capitalist production model is not an economic one which should be opposed to a certain "social" constituted through a different paradigm'.

On the other hand, this homology between Laclau and Žižek also leaves us in a good position to grasp the specificity of the difference between them. One way of putting this relates to Žižek's critique of Laclau's historicism. For Laclau,

³² They go on to compare societies where the 'reproduction of material life is carried out by means of fundamentally repetitive practices' and where the 'discursive sequences which organize social life are predominantly stable' with the contemporary world in which 'technological change and the dislocating rhythm of capitalist transformation constantly alter the discursive sequences which construct the reality of objects' (Laclau and Mouffe, 1990: 118-9). It is only in the latter that the discovery of discourse – and the concomitant separation of linguistic form from content – becomes possible.

when meaning fails, when signifiers become loosened from their taken-for-granted signifieds, we can talk about historicism – i.e. the shifting nature of ways of producing meaning. However, we cannot talk about historicity proper, as the system of signs through which social interaction is mediated is not a *historically specific* transcendental a priori, to use Žižek's phrase. In other words, in Laclau's theory when this system fails, when meaning breaks down, a series of hegemonic struggles attempt to fix that system. In contrast, what Žižek calls, the 'class-and-commodity structure of capitalism' *is* historically specific in this way, and Žižek's concept of 'class antagonism' aims to capture this dynamic. In representing the breakdown of the commodity-form as universal structuring principle, class antagonism provides the opportunity to change that system, not simply reproduce it in a different way.³³

We can see then that it is here that the more radical conception of negativity put forward in the psychoanalytic critique of poststructuralism becomes significant. Using my previous distinction we could argue that Žižek's concept of class antagonism attempts to grasp the *failure* of the commodity-form (as universal structuring principle), while Laclau (and poststructuralism more generally) can be said to merely describe the *instability* of that form. To put this another way, we can observe that in Laclau's work it is noticeable how the commodity-form doesn't fail.

I'll finish this section with two examples of this last point. Žižek has provided a Marxist critique of Laclau on this issue in response to the latter's argument that the source of class antagonism 'cannot be internal to the capitalist relations of production, but has to be sought in something that the worker is outside those relations, something which is threatened by them: the fact that below a certain level of wages the worker cannot live a decent life, and so on' (Laclau, 2000b: 202):

I not only endorse Laclau's anti-objectivist stance; I even think that when he opposes 'objective' relations of production and 'subjective' struggle and resistance,

³³ Malik (1996: 247-8) has also argued, in relation to postmodern theories of 'contingency' and 'indeterminacy', that 'it is precisely indeterminacy that is the foundation of ahistoric explanations. In order to be historically or socially specific one must understand the determinations of any social fact and its relationship with the totality in which it appears. Repudiating such certainty, and celebrating ambivalence, denies us the ability to grasp social phenomena in their specificity'.

he makes too much of a concession to objectivism. There are no 'objective' relations of production which can *then* involve or not involve the resistance of the individuals caught up in them: the very absence of struggle and resistance – the fact that both sides involved in relations accept them without resistance – *is already the index of the victory of one side in the struggle* (Žižek, 2000b: 319-20).

A similar 'concession to objectivism' is also picked up by two non-Marxist authors: J. K. Gibson-Graham and Michele Barrett. In *Hegemony* Laclau and Mouffe (2001: 160-4) describe the historical conditions underpinning the new conditions of plurality in which social actors now find themselves in the contemporary world. This novel context is brought about by the dislocations wrought by post-war capitalism, which have, in commodifying ever greater areas of the social, led to a plurality of antagonisms in their wake. Here, as both Gibson-Graham and Barrett have pointed out, Laclau and Mouffe rely on a conception of capitalism as a seemingly autonomous logic of commodification. Barrett (1994: 257), for example, states that their thesis about post-World War II capitalist development is 'concerned with the expansion of capitalist relations into previously non-capitalist areas, but it rests on an extraordinary construction of capitalism as being about "commodification" but not necessarily about labour/capital contradictions'. For Barrett 'what is interesting about their constitution of "capitalism" is that it remains an elemental and undefined agent in the argument – yet an agent whose existence they have, in general terms, challenged'. Similarly, Gibson-Graham (1996: 6), in remarking on the same argument of Laclau and Mouffe's concerning the commodification of social relations, notes the 'sense that these processes are driven by a logic (in other words they are the phenomenal expressions of an underlying essence)'. The key point, then, is that for Laclau the commodity-form, and the process of commodification more generally, plays an important role in his social theory, but it is a logic imbued with an 'objective', unfailing character that is out of kilter with his poststructuralism.

2.2 Reworking Laclau's Concepts #1: Dislocation and Antagonism

I have spoken above of 'class antagonism' as the failure of the commodity-form as a universal structuring principle or transcendental a priori. However, in order to try to make this a more usable concept for an empirical inquiry (or, at least, a more empirically-minded inquiry), it is worth distinguishing between two aspects of the antagonism in a way that Laclau has, but Žižek has not. What I want to suggest is that class antagonism should be seen, following Laclau, as a broader term including two distinct dimensions: dislocation and class struggle.

We saw above that Laclau initially introduced the concept of dislocation in response to Žižek's early criticism of *Hegemony*. This shift meant that social antagonism was now conceived as a potential response to a more fundamental negativity preceding it: since the publication of *New Reflections* Laclau has thought of identity as 'inherently dislocated because constituted around a lack in the Lacanian sense. In this sense, antagonism is one way to discursively master the limit of representation – namely the lack – even if these attempts to master the lack always ultimately fail' (Thomassen, 2005: 635). This more radical negativity results from the '*disruption* of a structure by forces operating *outside* it', to use Laclau's concise definition (1990: 50). With Žižek's change of emphasis from language to the economy, we can use a similar definition to describe the dislocations of the class-commodity structure of modern capitalism.

In order to expand on this definition it is important to say more about the concept of structure that is involved here. This concept is not particularly theorised in Žižek's writings; if he has clearly made a case for the key structuring role of the commodity, a corresponding notion of a class structure does not follow in his work. This can undoubtedly be linked to the fact that, as I've noted above, Žižek continues to equate the social with the Lacanian symbolic order, despite his Marxist theoretical commitments. Matters are further complicated by the fact that, on the one hand, Žižek emphasises the essential contingency and antagonism at the heart of any conception of structure or

objectivity in a manner reminiscent of a poststructuralist such as Laclau.³⁴ On the other hand, one of Žižek's key positions in his theorisation of capitalism is a decisive rejection of the economy as nothing more than a sedimented practice. He has written, for example, that for him there definitely is an object 'the economy' that is not just a theoretical abstraction, an object 'whose inner logic can be deployed through the immanent analysis of its notional structure'. For Žižek, if one 'does *not* take this abstraction seriously, then [using Devenney's words] "other aspects of the social totality would not be seen" in their concrete role within social totality'. In this sense, '[c]apitalism is *not* just the outcome of multiple discursive strategies and struggles for hegemony – the "logic of the capital" is a singular matrix which designates its real' (Žižek, 2007: 211).

One way of proceeding here is to understand Žižek as putting forward two dimensions of social practice: one at the level of the practices that fall under a particular, historical, transcendental a priori (this is the level at which discourse theory is practiced); the second at the more fundamental level of the transcendental a priori itself. The social structure that emerges can be understood as a result of both of these aspects. On the one hand, as I've already stressed, from the point of view of the situated 'discursive' subject, capital clearly exists as an object, 'out there', and serves to establish the fundamental coordinates of social life. Here, practical activity can emerge around the edges, so to speak, in the gaps and interstices opened up by dislocatory pressures – but it is activity that is clearly structured in the realist sense of that term. On the other hand, where Žižek's concept of class antagonism seems to lead us is towards the assertion of a more fundamental dimension of practice that for Žižek constitutes this formal object itself.

Further weight for this interpretation can be found in the introduction to *The Parallax View*: there he distinguishes his project from Lukács' thought: the 'problem is not how to overcome the external opposition of thought and being by deploying their practico-dialectical mediation, but *how, from within the flat order of positive being, the very gap between thought and being, the negativity of thought, emerges*'. In this sense, while 'Lukács et al. endeavour to

³⁴ In *Tarrying With the Negative* he writes that the Lacan he defends 'accepts the "deconstructionist" motif of radical contingency, but turns this motif against itself, using it to assert his commitment to Truth as contingent' (Žižek, 1993: 4).

demonstrate how thought is an active-constitutive moment of social being', Zizek aims at 'the "practical" aspect of the very passivity of thought: how is it possible, for a living-being, to break/suspend the cycle of the reproduction of life, to *install a non-act, a withdrawal into reflexive distance from being, as the most radical intervention?*' (Zizek, 2006: 6). As I understand Zizek's thought, the commodity-form as a universal structuring principle of contemporary societies names precisely just such a prior moment of practice by which the very possibility of a *social* subject becomes possible. It is only after this that the interaction between subjects and their objective conditions of existence that Lukacs describes becomes possible.

Does this then lead back to a base-superstructure model, as Laclau (2005: 236) suggests, with a more fundamental economic level determining (in an albeit complex manner) non-economic superstructures? I would argue against this conclusion. While it is true that, for Zizek, there is 'something more fundamental than the struggle for hegemony' (as Laclau puts it, *ibid*) this is not itself understood as completely non-political in the sense that a determining economic base is. Rather, the point is the politicisation of this more fundamental level; that is, we don't have to choose between an apolitical economic determination, or a discursive theory of pure contingency.³⁵ Indeed, as I have argued above, these positions have less between them than it would at first appear: the reason why Laclau emphasises contingency at the expense of a *theorisation* of determination is because the system of signs of discourse theory denotes a transcendental a priori that doesn't *fail*, which is not historically specific in this precise way. In this sense discourse theory can be understood as a theory of capital as an unstable, but nonetheless successful social form. This is why in Laclau's argument – as Barrett points out (above) – capital, as a social form or structuring principle, clearly does have very important determinant effects and therefore a key *empirical* presence. However, it is

³⁵ John Rosenthal (1988: 50-1), in his critique of Laclau and Mouffe, makes a similar point regarding the idea of the determination of the economic 'base': 'by analyzing class division out of the very concept of capital, what we find is that the space of the economy is itself shot through with political antagonism, that far from being the autonomous instance uniquely determining processes at other "superstructural" levels, the economic *is* determinant only insofar as the other instances can be understood as participating in *its* constitution, and this is precisely the reason that we are here dealing with overdetermined *instances* rather than isolable domains of activity'.

simply a taken-for-granted empirical fact, without an analysis of points of rupture, failure and consequent struggle.³⁶

Another way of making this point is in relation to the concept of the 'political', relied upon by Laclau. As Glyn Daly (2009) argues, drawing on the thought of Badiou: for Žižek, Laclau's political/politics distinction taken from Lefort (politics as a particular demographic region of the social versus the political as the ontologically constitutive moment that founds the social) is not so clear-cut:

Badiou, for example, argues convincingly that what is called the political cannot be universalized or resolved philosophically in a once-and-for-all manner. The political, in this regard, is always bound by *a* politics... The distinction Lefort makes between politics and the political becomes consequently more blurred. There exists rather an ongoing interweaving of the two moments (of politics and the political), in characteristic fashion, within the terms of a broader configuration which we might call the historical mode of politics (ibid: 281).

Further on, Daly argues in a similar manner that the 'political is never a simple purity but is always grounded or "economized" in some way (economized, that is, as a *political* constitution)' (ibid: 293), and adds in a footnote a useful qualification:

To avoid misunderstanding, 'the political' certainly cannot be reduced to the 'economic' – there is always the possibility of rupture/event and so on. Equally, however, we cannot speak of the political as axiomatically disengaged. Here the primacy of the political should be understood as the primacy of demarcating and structuring the space(s), or the mode, in which the logics of constitution and subversion become historically operational. It is neither the Political or the Economic but, in this broader sense, political-economy (ibid: 300).³⁷

³⁶ Again, Rosenthal (1988: 51) makes a similar point: 'Laclau and Mouffe recognize this incidence of political struggle within the space of the economic as well, but they do so as if it were just "there to be recognized," existing in the empirical-concrete of politico-discursive practices'. In other words, the political already exists in the economic as a simple empirical fact; it does not threaten the economic as an objective, formal structure in a more complex, 'dialectical' fashion, as it does for Žižek.

³⁷ The equivalent in discourse theory would be to see that there is a *political* moment at the heart of the process in which the sign comes to take the role of universal structuring principle or transcendental a priori – but as we have seen it is this political moment (or political-economic moment as Daly suggests) that is tellingly excluded. Discourse arises from a purely intellectual recognition of contingency, albeit one that has a key economic-technological process – the rise of capitalism – as its 'condition of possibility' (as I've noted above).

A 'mode' in which the 'logics of constitution and subversion become historically operational' is a good definition, I think, of the capitalist structure as Žižek understands it.

I believe, then, that Žižek's shift towards the economy can be defended from the charge that he resuscitates an outdated base/superstructure model.

Furthermore, this shift has an important impact on the concept of dislocation.

For Laclau all social conflicts tend to be understood in the same way: as antagonisms that emerge in response to dislocations (as we will see in more detail below). This is because his conception of structure as discursive – as the totality of relations that emerge from the production of a (temporarily) stable system of signs – ensures that there is no fundamental distinction in the way in which struggles can affect that structure. Žižek's focus on the commodity-form, however, changes this, enabling a distinction to be made: struggles can be identified as dislocatory to the extent that they produce identities that fall outside the social structure and disrupt it from this position (recall Laclau's definition of dislocation: the '*disruption* of a structure by forces operating *outside* it').

In order to develop this idea, we can build on the often-made point about a key, and novel, feature of the commodity-form as an organising principle in society: that of the formal equality and freedom of individuals as commodity-owners.³⁸

This principle is not only important in the functioning of a market-based economic system, but has, in many countries, become a key principle in organising social relations through the development of liberal-democratic institutions. At the same time, however, these same societies continue to display significant inequality and social divisions that tend to put this principle of formal equality under strain.³⁹ One way of conceptualising this instability is through the concept of dislocation: a social conflict – say, over racism – can lead to the emergence of an unequal social identity – say, black people in Britain – that both stands *outside* the class-commodity structure to the extent that this identity is not a class, and *disrupts* that structure through the presence

³⁸ 'The sphere of circulation or commodity exchange, within whose boundaries the sale and purchase of labour-power goes on, is in fact a very Eden of the innate rights of man. It is the exclusive realm of Freedom, Equality, Property and Bentham' (Marx, 1976: 280).

³⁹ See Wallerstein (1991) for an example of this type of argument.

of this group as an embodiment of inequality, and therefore the failure of formal equality in society.

We can then distinguish this type of conflict from class struggle using Laclau's model. Antagonism is theorised, by Laclau, as a possible response to dislocation that, on the one hand, can have a stabilising function in that a relatively unified social identity or space is established, internal to the social structure, through the expulsion of an enemy that threatens it. However, as Torfing (1999: 131) notes: '[e]mphasis on the *stabilizing function* of social antagonism should not allow us to forget that social antagonism is also a *source of dislocation*... Social antagonism is undoubtedly a double-edged sword, as it constitutes and sustains social identity by positing a threat to that very identity'.

Class struggle can be similarly understood as a possible response to dislocation; a response characterised by the introduction of certain equivalential effects into society. These effects can be said to have precisely the ambiguous consequences that Torfing identifies. On the one hand, it can serve to produce an identity, the working-class, that provides a relatively stable space within the class structure; a space in which the different demands and interests generated by the dislocatory effects of the economic crises and social conflicts generated by capitalism can be brought together and articulated. In other words there is a simplification of social space so that previously disarticulated fragments can be fused together and incorporated into a single social group. However, this process through which the negative effects of dislocations are positivised (to use Laclau and Mouffe's terminology) can only be achieved at the price of transferring this negativity to an enemy that threatens the identity: an exploiting capitalist class. The threat from this type of inequality is distinct, then, from that of dislocations: while both types of struggle can be said to cause the commodity-form to fail as the universal structuring principle in society, dislocatory struggles produce identities that lie outside or are excluded from the social structure, the former – class struggle – produces an identity that is an unequal antagonist *within* that structure.

While this is only a brief sketch and I am not able to here expand on this argument, the advantage of drawing this distinction between class struggle and

dislocation – as two component parts of Žižek's concept of class antagonism – is that it enables an understanding of the difference between class and non-class inequalities that avoids collapsing the two together as Laclau does.⁴⁰ Equally, this distinction means that we can avoid any suggestion that non-class inequalities are insignificant – they are as significant as dislocations are in Laclau's theory. The common link among the huge variety of conflicts and struggles in capitalist societies is not that they are all somehow embodiments of class struggle, but rather that any conflict can dislocate the basic capitalist framework.⁴¹

In relation to understanding the new social movements for example (by which I mean the various struggles around non-class inequalities that emerged post-war): rather than understanding them as a consequence of the *success* of the commodity-form in colonising new areas of social life, as Laclau and Mouffe do, we can offer the hypothesis that they in fact, initially at least, caused the *failure* of the commodity-form as a universal structuring principle. I say 'initially' because, as we will see in the following chapters, with the advent of multiculturalism we also find a narrative of incorporation, of integration of these struggles within the capitalist system.

This last point is important, as so far I have only described class struggle as a way of articulating an unequal and antagonistic relation; clearly, it can also be used to describe a hegemonic response to social conflict. The latter can perhaps best be understood less as an opposing enemy camp on the other end of the class relation,⁴² and more as a hegemonic dissipation of that antagonism. One of my overarching concerns in the chapters that follow is to, within the context of equality and diversity in Britain, add evidence to our understanding of the shift in the way in which this antagonism is dealt with: from an attempt (particularly post-war) to integrate the working-class as subject, within the

⁴⁰ In a dialogue with Žižek, Laclau (2000b: 203) writes that 'class struggle is just one species of identity politics, and one which is becoming less and less important in the world in which we live'.

⁴¹ This is how I would interpret a point made by Žižek a number of times. In *The Parallax View*, for example, he writes that we should not think that 'class struggle is the ultimate referent and horizon of meaning of all other struggles'; rather, we should think of it as 'the structuring principle which allows us to account for the very "inconsistent" plurality of ways in which other antagonisms can be articulated into "chains of equivalence"' (Žižek, 2006: 361).

⁴² As Balibar (1991: 179) remarks: '[o]nly exceptionally does the class struggle take the form of civil war, whether on the level of representation or physical reality, and that is mainly when it is overdetermined by religious or ethnic conflict, or when it is combined with war between states'.

regulatory structures of the nation-state, to an attempt to integrate various disadvantaged minority groups in its place.

2.3 Reworking Laclau's Concepts #2: Myth and Social Imaginary

'Myth' and 'social imaginary' are two terms developed by Laclau to understand the way in which social orders are reproduced. Myths emerge in response to dislocations and provide a coherent framework or space through which various conflicting demands and systemic pressures can be reconciled:

Myths construct new spaces of representation that attempt to suture the dislocated space in question. Their effectiveness is essentially hegemonic, as they involve the formation of 'a new objectivity by means of the rearticulation of the dislocated elements'. From their emergence until their dissolution, myths can function as a surface of inscription for a variety of social demands and dislocations (Howarth and Stavrakakis, including quote from Laclau, 2000: 15).

Social imaginaries, on the other hand, name those myths that move from serving as a response to relatively local disturbances to a more general set of demands and tensions:

when a myth has proved to be successful in neutralising social dislocations and incorporating a great number of social demands, then we can say that the myth has been transformed to an imaginary. A collective social imaginary is defined by Laclau as 'a horizon' or 'absolute limit which structures a field of intelligibility' (ibid: 15-6).

Again, I believe this conceptual distinction can be extremely useful in conducting more concrete research generally. However, it is particularly useful to the analysis of my empirical findings as we see a clear shift in the development of multiculturalism, and, more specifically, equality and diversity, from a local logic arising in response to particular conflicts, to one that increasingly expands into a more general ideological framework – one able to respond to a wide range of different demands from across society.

As above, though, it is necessary to specify the changes undergone by the concepts in utilising them within a broadly Zizekian approach. This transformation obviously relates back to my specification of the central difference between Zizek and Laclau's social ontologies. For Laclau, myths and social imaginaries provide more or less temporary stabilisations of 'meaning' – with 'meaning', as I've indicated, referring not to particular practices within the social formation, but rather to how the structuring principle of the social is understood. As I've argued, this theory can be read as a way of describing the unstable, but ultimately successful, role of the commodity-form as universal structuring principle in contemporary capitalist societies. With the introduction of class antagonism this changes: myths and social imaginaries can be understood as playing a central role in reproducing a successful capitalist system. In response to dislocations and class struggles, they provide 'new spaces of representation' in which social demands can be made and incorporated in a relatively harmonious manner.

Again, we need to ask the question: does this reference to a capitalist system mean a return to a base/superstructure metaphor? Again, I would argue against this conclusion. Zizek is in agreement with Laclau that ideology cannot be reduced to a particular region within the social, and that hegemonic social imaginaries cannot therefore be reduced to a superstructural moment within a broader social topography (see, for example, Zizek, 1994: 14-5).

However, for Zizek it is possible for the critique of ideology to link the particular orders of more temporary hegemonic social imaginaries with the underlying success of the commodity-form as structuring principle. For instance, take this example from Zizek (2007: 210) himself where he responds to the charge that his (Zizek's) claim that 'Western Buddhism as the ideal ideological form of today's global capitalism, relies on the naive-realist notion of ideology which is directly generated by the objective socio-economic process and, as such, not the result of contingent discursive struggles for hegemony':

the present image of Western Buddhism is, of course, a discursive construct, the result of a series of contingent encounters...But there is a limit to this undecided

game – not a limit in the sense of pre-existing reality that the predominant ideology should 'reflect', but a limit in the sense of the capitalist set of social relations which are in themselves not a pre-discursive fact but involve their own 'ideology', that of commodity fetishism.

The limit to myths and social imaginaries, then, lies not in a specific area of the social that escapes and/or determines ideological phenomena, but rather is itself a prior ideological closure (what I have termed, after Žižek, a 'historically specific transcendental a priori' or 'universal structuring principle'). A closure that is not simply opposed to openness though in the Laclauian sense – stabilising a certain social field, establishing a specific configuration of elements etc – but rather one that in effect produces openness, or rather a regime in which the openness/closure dialectic can proceed. In this sense, then, this fundamental ideological closure establishes a prior successful terrain upon which various hegemonic projects can compete (Daly, 2009: 292). Once we understand that this ideological core fails we can see that a more concrete ideological configuration, such as multiculturalism, cannot be understood as superstructural in any standard sense of that term, but, at the same time, should not be considered as a mere 'result of contingent discursive struggles', distinct from the reproduction of the broader capitalist framework.

2.4 Conclusion

The arguments presented in this chapter have been necessarily abstract and involve some difficult ideas; I am also well aware that they are undeveloped at this stage as I do not have the space in this thesis to be able to pursue further the lines of argument presented. However, I do return to these ideas in the final chapter in order to show how they can help us produce some more concrete claims about the development of multiculturalism and equality and diversity in Britain. Here, I will try to demonstrate the applicability of the theory to empirical research – an obviously central factor in judging the strength of any theoretical argument. I will also, in this concluding chapter, make explicit some of the more obvious unanswered questions raised by the arguments made above.

Finally, in order to try to simplify the complexity of this chapter, I will substitute a more standard summarising paragraph with a point-by-point list of the successive arguments put forward:

- 1) Žižek's concept of class antagonism can be understood as the failure of the commodity-form as a universal structuring principle or, to use Žižek's phrase, 'historically specific transcendental a priori'.
- 2) It can be modelled on Laclau's concept of antagonism to the extent that the commodity and the sign function in Žižek and Laclau's thought as homologous *formal* structures that encompass all social practices.
- 3) This homology enables us to utilise some of Laclau's concepts with the necessary adjustments made.
- 4) The concept of dislocation can be used to understand the impact of non-class struggles over inequality on the capitalist system through the external, disruptive impact of the identities produced.
- 5) Class struggle can be understood as a response to dislocation, one that introduces an equivalence into the social through which a group, the working class, forms with interests in opposition to the capitalist social structure.
- 6) Myths and social imaginaries can be understood as ideological mechanisms that respond to dislocations and class struggles by providing spaces within which demands can be met in a non-conflictual manner.

Chapter Three: The Origins of Multiculturalism in Britain

Neither Laclau nor Žižek could be described as empirically-minded thinkers, and while, as I have argued, it is the former who has developed concepts more easily applicable to empirical enquiry, he has not himself engaged in any sustained attempt to test those concepts against real-world developments. However, it would be a mistake, I think, to dismiss either theorist as merely playing at intellectual games detached from a concrete political reality. Furthermore, for both thinkers the rise of identity politics and multiculturalism is one aspect of this reality that is particularly important to their respective theoretical projects. Laclau and Mouffe wrote *Hegemony* in 1985 against the backdrop of the collapse of traditional left-wing forces, seemingly powerless against the rise of neoliberalism and a renewed right wing hegemony. At the same time, untried and untested movements and theories emerging around the question of identity – the promotion of equality for groups such as ethnic minorities, women and gay people – were seemingly on the rise and capable of offering a fresh alternative to the focus on class politics at the heart of the 'old left'. The argument of *Hegemony* is clearly situated in relation to these developments: it seeks to provide the theoretical foundations for placing these new movements as firm equals alongside class, in a renewed left-wing project.

The political developments animating Žižek's thought are perhaps less explicit, but it is nonetheless clear that at the heart of his theoretical project lies the observation that capitalism has achieved an unparalleled ideological success, and the contemporary left has clearly failed to pose a successful – or, for Žižek, even particularly credible – challenge. A central aspect of this failure for Žižek is the impasse he believes the Left's turn away from class towards a politics of identity and culture has led. Significantly, his explicit anti-capitalism developed over the course of the 1990s from a position initially much closer to the 'radical democracy' of Laclau; significant, I think, because between 1985 and the end of the following decade the link between identity politics and a radical left-wing agenda seemed much less certain. The freshness and potential the former had once held, or at least had seemed to hold, had clearly dissipated as many of the themes and ideas had been taken up and put into practice without any obvious

dent in a seemingly unstoppable capitalism. As Malik (2009: 58) has observed in relation to the radicalism of the GLC: at the time many of its policies were 'derided as "loony left" by the Conservative press'; however, within a decade 'they had been rebranded as "multiculturalism", and had become as unexceptional as curry and chips on a Friday night'.

What lay behind this, in many ways, extraordinary rise to prominence of multiculturalism also provides, then, an important historical background to the debate between Laclau and Žižek. It is therefore worth examining this history more closely in order to provide a context for both the case study findings to follow and the theoretical arguments explored in the previous chapter. However, given the limits of space and the complexity of this history, I will not attempt to provide a complete chronological account, but instead focus on three central themes: 1) the emergence of multicultural policies, on the part of local councils, in response to the civil disorder of the 1980s; 2) the decline of class as a social reality; 3) the impact of critique on the trajectory of multiculturalism as an ideological formation.

3.1 Riots and the Response

The origins of multiculturalism in Britain can be traced back to the reaction of the state to a number of social disturbances that took place in the first half of the 1980s. Kenan Malik (2009), who has provided a useful account of this history, describes – against the 'background of a nation increasingly polarized on the issue of race, a nation in which a new intensity of racism was matched by the fierceness of the response from a new generation of blacks and Asians' (ibid: 41) – three local government responses to street disturbances (in London, Birmingham and Bradford). These disturbances involved young people from ethnic minority communities.⁴³ In the case of London the Brixton riot of 1981, in Malik's words, 'came to symbolize the breakdown of race relations in Britain' (ibid: 56). While one in a large number of urban conflicts, it was only after the

⁴³ Although the ethnically mixed nature of those taking part including young white people is a widely noted fact: Gilroy (2002: 26), for example, states that only between 29 and 33 per cent of those arrested in the 1981 riots were 'non-white'. See also Phillips and Phillips (1998: 357-64) and Chris Harman (1981).

Brixton riot that a public inquiry, headed by Lord Scarman, was initiated into the cause of the disturbances and what could be done to prevent them recurring. While the Scarman report famously dismissed the suggestion of 'institutional racism', it is notable for pointing to, in the words of Sivanandan (1990: 90), a 'new ethnic strategy', one received with 'enthusiasm (and relief) by Tory and Labour alike'. The strength of the language used by Scarman is worth noting: without government action, racial disadvantage could become an 'endemic, ineradicable disease threatening the very survival of our society' (quoted in Malik, 2009: 57).

As Malik goes on to point out, however, the action promised by this report was not at odds with the Thatcher government more generally, despite her 'tough' reputation on the issues of race and immigration. As Malik puts it:

Faced with major urban unrest, the Thatcher government responded in a typically pragmatic fashion, throwing resources not at more riot police but at inner-city communities... There was a widespread recognition that unless black activists were given a political stake in the system, their frustration could threaten the stability of Britain's inner cities (ibid: 56-7).

However it was the Labour party, rather than the Conservatives, that were able to initiate such actions due to the fact that the latter were regarded by many black activists as the 'party of racism', making cooperation difficult. Labour also had political control, at the level of local government, of many of those areas that had experienced unrest, at a time when many Labour activists were looking to new channels for progressive, political activity due to the problems their party faced on the national stage (ibid: 57-58).

It was in this context that Ken Livingstone's Greater London Council (GLC) 'pioneered a new strategy of making minority communities feel part of British society' (ibid: 58). This new strategy involved three elements: 1) the promotion of social and political equality for ethnic minorities through establishing equal opportunity policies, race relations units, and arranging consultations with representatives of minority communities; 2) the provision of resources – largely through financing ethnic minority organisations; 3) the recognition of difference:

At the heart of the GLC's anti-racist strategy was not simply the reallocation of resources but also a redefinition of racism. Racism now meant not the denial of equal rights but the denial of the right to be different. Black people, so the argument went, should not be forced to accept British values or to adopt a British identity. Rather, different peoples should have the right to express their own identities, explore their own histories, formulate their own values, pursue their own lifestyles. In the process, the very meaning of equality was transformed: from possessing the same rights as everyone else, to possessing different rights appropriate to different communities (ibid: 59).

Malik highlights the same three elements in the council's response to unrest in Bradford: a promotion of equal opportunities, the establishment of race relations units and a 'new channel of communication between the council and the communities'; financial aid for minority organisations; a race relations policy that stated that every section of the city had 'an equal right to maintain its own identity, culture, language, religion and customs'. The latter element can be summed up in the words of the first aim of its 'race relations initiative': to 'bring about social justice' through establishing an '[e]quality of esteem between different cultures' (citing a Bradford Council document, ibid: 73).

We can already see, then, in this brief description of council responses to the riots, the complex nature of multiculturalism. While undoubtedly best known as the celebration and accommodation of cultural differences, identities, values and so on, this idea is, in fact, interwoven with crucial economic, social and political dimensions. As I mentioned in chapter one, it is the historical evolution of the relationship between an emphasis on difference and one aspect of the *social* dimension – the specific type of redistributive equality policy pursued through the equality and diversity agenda – that concerns me for much of the rest of this thesis.

There is a further aspect of these early multicultural initiatives that is of importance, relating to the nature of the differences that were promoted. It is a widely noted fact that minority identities emerged in a specific, institutionalised, contemporary form in Britain as a result of the kind of multicultural policies I have briefly described above. For example, the authors of an account of the development of post-war race relations in Britain write that one problem with the

GLC, and its policies, was 'its effect on the identity of the black communities. Under the rubric of the GLC, the communities which came from Caribbean, African and Asian roots, became "ethnic minorities"' (Phillips and Phillips, 1998: 374). This rise of ethnicity is also recorded by Sivanandan (1990: 94), who notes the effect on identities of the competition for resources that were made available for non-white communities:

The ensuing scramble for government favours and government grants (channelled through local authorities) on the basis of specific ethnic needs and problems served, on the one hand, to deepen ethnic differences and foster ethnic rivalry and, on the other, to widen the definition of ethnicity to include a variety of national and religious groups – Chinese, Cypriots, Greeks, Turks, Irish, Italians, Jews, Moslems, Sikhs – till the term itself became meaningless (except as a means of getting funds).⁴⁴

Malik cites Smith and Stephenson who have made a similar point in relation to the effect of multicultural policies pursued in Birmingham. The 'model of engagement' used by the council – in which Umbrella Groups were set up on an ethnic and religious basis in order to distribute funds and represent community interests (Malik, 2009: 65) – 'tended to result in competition between BME [black and ethnic minority] communities for resources. Rather than prioritizing needs and cross-community working, the different Umbrella Groups generally attempted to maximize their own interests' (Smith and Stephenson, quoted in *ibid*: 68).

However, clearly it is not the case that these differences were invented or created by multicultural policies, but rather that they gained a certain form and importance that had not existed previously. There is clearly a complex interplay between ethnic differences and the submergence of these differences in a unified identity (a theme I return to in chapter eight). Malik (*ibid*: 52), for example, notes the influence, on radical anti-racist movements of the time, of the Black Power movement in the United States. Here, the idea of 'self-organisation' meant that an anti-racist unity between black and white was not

⁴⁴ We might also add that other minority groups (based on characteristics such as gender or sexuality) similarly seem to take on an 'ethnic' form to the extent that they compete through the same model – see Malik (2009: 61) and Michaels (2006: 5).

thought possible through a simple merger with existing, white, organisations, but could only be the product of a more complex process involving specifically black (i.e. non-white) organisations. Malik cites the words of one such activist at the time, Tariq Mehmood: '[w]e had to put our own house in order' before uniting as equals with the 'white left'.

However, for Malik this 'temporary organizational separation for political reasons gave way to the notion of permanent cultural distinctiveness as a fact of life'; what began as an anti-racist strategy became a 'celebration of cultural separation' (ibid: 54). This shift can be traced through the black political identity that existed prior to the impact of multicultural policies. Its central characteristic was its specifically political connotation as an anti-racist identity that consciously included, and sought to bridge, identities based on ethnic or cultural differences. It would also be fair, I think, to argue that it had a certain anti-systemic, antagonistic nature. Clearly events in the United States, again, influenced developments in Britain in relation to this point where a positive, politicised black identity arose accompanying the rise of Black Power and the more general radicalisation of anti-racist struggles.⁴⁵ However, as Malik makes clear, it was given a 'peculiarly British' flavour by specifically incorporating both those of African and Asian origin. 'In Britain', writes Malik, 'young blacks and Asians were attempting to forge a more inclusive identity rooted in politics rather than ethnicity or skin colour, while at the same time trying to highlight the divisive character of racism' (ibid: 51-2). The whiteness to which blackness was opposed denoted, in the same way, not a particular ethnic difference but rather characterised the racist social structure more generally.

One way of seeing this emergence of a black identity is not as a simple rejection of ethnic difference, but rather as a construction that emerged through the failure of the system or social structure to incorporate different ethnic interests. As Sivanandan (1990: 96) observes in relation to the period following the Scarman report and the emergence of multicultural efforts to engage with distinct ethnic groups:

⁴⁵ I am grateful to Alex Callinicos for this point.

By and large, the ethnics were content to fight each other in their quest for office. And it was only when there was a white blockage in the system, preventing them from going up further, that the ethnics turned 'black' and pulled out all their oppressed 'black' history to beat the whites with. Hence the demand for Black Sections in the Labour Party; the rise and fall of the Black Media Workers' Association (BMWA) (the fall coming after the white media made room for them in ethnic slots – since when they have gone back to being Afro-Caribbeans and Asians, respectively); and the emergence of a black trade union aristocracy, the Black Trade Union Solidarity Movement (BTUSM).

This oscillation that Sivanandan describes highlights an important link between ideas of difference and attempts to stabilise the system, or central governing structure. These attempts have to combine the need to meet black demands from below with the promotion of horizontal ethnic identities that tend to split up and dissipate this more radical black identity. This brings Laclau's theory of equivalence and difference to mind and this connection is taken up in more detail in the concluding chapter. The key point to emphasise for now, however, is that the success of this strategy, and the corresponding rise of ethnicity and fall of a politicised black identity, depended on the ability of the state to become responsive to minority demands. Furthermore, this was something the state was, by and large, very successful at.⁴⁶

3.2 The Decline of Class in Society

One of the indisputable trends in Britain over the last 30 years or so is that of a decline of class struggle and a working-class identity,⁴⁷ alongside that of the rise of a politics of difference already discussed. While the historical coincidence of these two trends suggests a relationship between them of some kind, the

⁴⁶ The question of agency clearly raises itself here and at other points in this chapter: is the rise of multiculturalism that I describe here the result of a consciously pursued political strategy, or is it something which emerges more accidentally, as a result of 'multicultural drift' – as a text I will look at in the following chapter has put it (CFMEB, 2000: 14)? This is obviously a complex issue which I will put aside for now but return to in the final chapter.

⁴⁷ The precise nature of the link between class struggle and an empirically identifiable working-class is not an issue that I can deal with in this thesis, partly because neither Zizek nor Laclau are particularly concerned with this question – see Callinicos (2006: 117-119) for a critique of Zizek, and others, on this issue. What I have to say here and in the following chapters about the working class does not rely on any particular approach to class analysis.

precise nature of this relationship is heavily disputed. Some of the theoretical questions that arise in the course of the debate on this question between Zizek and Laclau have been highlighted in the previous chapter, and in the following chapters I want to use some of the empirical material collected to contribute to this debate. Here I want to set the scene for these later chapters by focusing on the history of this decline of class.

The first development to take account of is the emergence, post-war, of the new social movements. These were formed in response to non-class inequalities (among other non-class issues – militarisation and environmental destruction, for example). However, the novelty of these struggles does not lie in the mere existence of a non-class movement for justice – as Anne Phillips (1999: 20) points out 'it would be poor history to suggest that these [non-class] inequalities were only recently discovered'. It would seem rather that something changes in the significance that these inequalities have in relation to understanding social conflicts, and their relative importance in relation to class more specifically. To put it briefly, it is the centrality of class to inequality that appears to be challenged. As Phillips goes on to add, 'through an era dominated by the big "capitalism versus socialism" question, inequality had an inescapably class dimension', yet '[s]ubsequent developments have significantly modified this'.

There is an important historical distinction to be made here though, that parallels the theoretical distinction made in the previous chapter: the distinction between the oppositional, dislocatory impact of the new social movements, on the one hand, and their incorporation through the rise of identity politics and, later, multiculturalism, on the other. If we return to Malik's description of the development of multiculturalism, it is noticeable that the *oppositional* anti-racist movements of the time he mentions clearly thought of race as having an 'inescapably class dimension' (to use Phillips' phrase). He gives a number of examples of this: the Indian Workers Association (IWA), originally formed in 1938 in relation to the issue of Indian independence, was re-formed in response to the problems faced by immigrants from the subcontinent in post-war Britain:

The IWA organized both as a trade union, in factories, on the buses and in hospitals, and as an anti-racist campaigning organization within Asian communities.

It had close links to the labour movement in Britain and to the Communist Party of India, and its members invariably supported any action that local trade unions were taking, because, as the author and playwright Dilip Hiro put it, 'they believed that the economic lot of Indian workers was intimately intertwined with that of British workers' (Malik, 2009: 48).

This group (along with the Universal Coloured Peoples' Association [UCPA]) did not believe in any straightforward assimilation and rejected the idea that race issues could be subsumed within those of class, yet, nonetheless their anti-racism was ultimately directed towards the 'liberation of the class' (Sivanandan, 1990: 79). A later group influenced by the IWA, the Asian Youth Movement (AYM), similarly combined both race and class, being influenced by both traditional, left-wing, class-based British organisations, as well as the Black Power movement in America and the idea of 'black self-organisation' (as mentioned above). Malik (2009: 52), again, cites the words of Tariq Mehmood – an activist with the AYM: '[m]ost of us were workers and sons of workers...For us race and class were inseparable'.

Of course, this is not to suggest that there existed one clearly defined movement in which the two issues were seamlessly united, and that a rejection of established working-class organisations was not a strong feature of the anti-racist movements of the time. It is also important to be cautious about drawing too general a conclusion on the basis of limited evidence. Nonetheless, I think a good case can be made for the idea that the issue of racial inequality was not as separated from that of class as it often appears to be today. It is also worth considering whether this shift is linked to the rise of multiculturalism as an official ideology – in other words, if the question of the relationship between race and class is also a political, as well as a theoretical and historical, one.

This argument – that the shift from a more 'organic' connection between race and class to a more fragmented separation between the two issues is not just a historical fact, but also the outcome of a political process – is strongly made by Sivanandan in his collection of articles already cited, *Communities of Resistance* (1990). For example, in a revised version of a talk given in 1983 at a GLC consultation event, he argues that:

What ethnicity [the differences that become recognised in multiculturalism, as described above] has done is to mask the problem of racism and weaken the struggle against it. But then, that is precisely what it was meant to do. It was the riposte of the system – in the 1960s and 1970s – to the struggles of black people, both Afro-Caribbean and Asian, both in the workplace and in the community, as a people for a class, extra-parliamentary and extra-trade union. It was the riposte of a system that was afraid that the black working-class struggles would begin to politicise the working class as a whole. It was, in particular, the riposte of the class-collaborationist Labour governments of Wilson and Callaghan which sought in ethnic pluralism to undermine the underlying class aspect of black struggle and black politics (Sivanandan, 1990: 63-4).

He continues in a similar vein in relation to a description of the changing dynamic between the anti-racist movement and the state's response to it during the 1970s and 1980s:

on the ideological level a new battle was being mounted by the state against *black* struggles whereby they could be broken down into their ethnic and, through that, their class components. Ethnicity was a tool to blunt the edge of black struggles, to return 'black' to its constituent parts of Afro-Caribbean, Asian, African, Irish – and also, at the same time, to allow the nascent black bourgeoisie, petit-bourgeoisie really, to move up in the system. Ethnicity delinked black struggle – separating the West Indian from the Asian, the working-class black from the middle-class black (ibid: 67).

He goes on to describe the various government-funded 'ethnic policies and programmes' as 'Government moneys for pluralist ploys – the development of a parallel power structure for black people, separate development, Bantustans – a strategy to keep race issues from contaminating class issues' (ibid: 68).

What Sivanandan suggests, then, is that the already-noted fragmentation of a political blackness into particular ethnic/cultural identities was accompanied by a similarly depoliticising effect in relation to the class dimension of the black struggle, and that this was a deliberate aim behind the policies. Malik (2009: 57) also picks up on this point in relation to the response of the Conservative government to the urban unrest of the 1980s. He cites a *Sunday Times* profile

of Sir George Young,⁴⁸ written in October 1982, that describes the government's aim as: 'the creation in Britain of a small but prosperous black middle class'. Both authors add evidence, then, to the claim that the separation and depoliticisation of class, in relation to anti-racist struggles, was a consciously pursued and necessary effect of state-sponsored multicultural policies.

While, again, we need to be cautious here about the wider claims we can make from limited historical evidence, this discussion should nonetheless help provide a context for the decline of class as a particular type of political subjectivity and its separation from the issue of anti-racism – a decline that is clearly registered within the case studies and one that I will look at in more detail in the following chapters. However, my argument so far has relied largely on the observations of a writer (Sivanandan) who is primarily concerned with the effects of multiculturalism on a politicised *black* identity – albeit with, according to him, an 'inescapably class dimension'. As I noted, the existence of this identity can be seen as a reaction to the exclusionary, institutionalised whiteness of British society at the time, and this, importantly, included working-class institutions.⁴⁹ What about the decline of these institutions, however, and the identity that they supported? In the final part of this section I will briefly highlight some of the historical factors behind the decline of the working class that are not connected to the rise of multiculturalism, and that help give a context for the decline of class as a broader phenomenon.

Clearly economic changes are key here: the expansion of global markets, economic restructuring, changes in production processes, the decline of manufacturing, the rise of unemployment as a permanent structural feature of neoliberal societies – these are all obviously central to the decline of the working class due to the negative impact they have had on the workplaces and areas most strongly associated with working-class identity and organisation. I

⁴⁸ The first minister for race relations who was appointed after the Brixton riot.

⁴⁹ On this point Roger Hewitt (2005: 27) argues that there was a high level of 'spontaneously organised trade union support for [Enoch] Powell', and that there is a 'clear connection between the very visible support from unionised labour for Powell's message and the long history of racially exclusionary practices in the trade union movement together with Labour's uneasy compromises with them'. Similarly, Malik (2009: 49) writes that, in the past, for 'black and Asian workers, taking industrial action often meant facing down not just the employer but the casually bigoted attitudes of union officials too'.

will not go into these changes in any detail as they are well known and not the main focus of my attention here.⁵⁰ It is important to keep these significant changes in mind, however, as they form an important background to the ideological and textual effects of the decline of the working class that I focus on in the chapters to follow.

Mike Savage (2000: 152) also draws our attention to the cultural aspect of this decline. He concludes his book on class and social change in Britain by arguing that 'much contemporary social and cultural change can be seen as the fallout from the eradication of the defining role of the working class in British culture'. While this process is clearly closely tied to the kind of economic changes noted above, he argues that those changes do not of themselves explain the decline of the working class as an established identity as, for one thing, these changes have not led to a disappearance of jobs that might be described as 'working class' in terms of pay, status, lack of control over the conditions and terms of employment and so on. He also distances himself from any claim about a 'fading of the golden, collective, working-class "community"', or the idea of 'embourgeoisement': the idea that the working class has disappeared into an expanded middle class. Rather what he claims is more interesting: it is that the 'idea of the working class served as a moral identifier for much of the twentieth century, and thereby helped consolidate a particular notion of the working class which had sustained importance in British society', and that the 'link between dominant notions of individuality and citizenship, which in Britain were closely associated with the working class, has in recent years been sundered, with profound social and cultural implications'. In other words, crucial to understanding the changes in class relations of recent times is the loss of the place the working class held in, to use Laclau's term, the dominant social imaginary. While the kind of 'raw material' (i.e. the pay and conditions at work just mentioned, but also the stark socio-economic inequalities that have opened up more generally in recent years⁵¹) out of which a working class is formed may still exist, it is, for Savage, the fashioning of this material into an identifiable

⁵⁰ See Fox-Piven (1995: 109-10) for a summary.

⁵¹ According to Danny Dorling, inequality in the UK is currently at its worst since the second world-war, and is a situation that has worsened significantly since 1979 and the impact of the rise of neoliberalism (Guardian, 2012).

group with a 'stake' in society, and the notions of individuality and citizenship that necessarily follow, that is important and that has dissolved over time.

This question of the relationship between the working class and the need to build a cohesive, national culture leads us naturally to the question of the political changes that have taken place. Again, these are well known. The pursuit of an aggressive right-wing agenda by Margaret Thatcher and the Conservative party confronted head-on trade union power and curtailed many of the rights and powers that had up until then served to cement the place of the working class as a political force in society. This was part of a more general neoliberal offensive outlined by David Harvey in *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* where he describes neoliberalism as the 'restoration of class power' (Harvey, 2005: 31). Harvey describes the central elements of Thatcher's strategy to reduce trade union power: the use of macro-economic policies to keep inflation down causing high unemployment and consequently reducing the power of organised labour;⁵² the confrontational stance towards powerful unions (most notably the actions leading to the miners' strike of 1984); finally, the dismantling of industries with powerful union traditions through the promotion of foreign competition and investment in the UK. Harvey sums up these efforts like this: '[b]y the time Thatcher left office, strike activity had fallen to one-tenth of its former levels. She had eradicated inflation, curbed union power, tamed the labour force, and built middle-class consent for her policies in the process' (ibid: 59). All of these changes impacted not only on the trade unions but also the Labour party, which historically owed its existence and impetus to the protection and promotion of working-class interests (ibid: 55). Having lost four elections in a row this historical link between Labour and the working class was, if not completely severed, significantly weakened when Labour reclaimed power in 1997 (ibid: 62-3).

In relation to the more specific ideological aspects of this political project we can note the (again, well known) emphasis on 'individual freedom' in opposition to notions of social equality and justice that were clearly linked to a recognisable

⁵² Harvey (2005: 59) quotes Alan Budd, an economic adviser to Thatcher, who suggested that 'the 1980s policies of attacking inflation by squeezing the economy and public spending were a cover to bash the workers'.

working-class movement. Echoing Savage's argument concerning the loss of identity, Harvey describes the

cultivation of a middle class that relished the joys of home ownership, private property, individualism, and the liberation of entrepreneurial opportunities. With working-class solidarities waning under pressure and job structures radically changing through deindustrialization, middle-class values spread more widely to encompass many of those who had once had a firm working-class identity (ibid: 61-2).

We should also – particularly given the fact that the empirical material of my case studies is largely textual – pay close attention to the linguistic aspects of this ideological project. David Cannadine (2000: 175-8), for example, has described how Margaret Thatcher made a concerted and deliberate effort to keep class, as a collective social category 'based on mutually hostile relations to the means of production', off the public agenda and replace it with the language of individuals, markets and consumers. This was something she was, as Cannadine points out, 'very successful' at and it was 'not coincidence that it was also in these years that they [class and class conflict] disappeared as the languages and concepts of historical inquiry' (ibid: 175). He notes the care she took in the terms she used in speaking of 'the working people' and 'the working population', but never 'the working class' as a single collective category. Interestingly, this aspect of Thatcherism was left unchanged by the arrival of New Labour (Cruddas, 2006). As we will see, an important feature of the New Labour discourse on equality and diversity is the interaction between this continuing absence of the working class, on the one hand, and, on the other, the return of ideas of equality, equal opportunities, social justice, and so on; ideas that are brought back to government as a consequence of Labour's traditional social-democratic heritage.

What this brief overview suggests is that there were a number of significant, deep-rooted and far reaching changes behind the decline of class and, more specifically, the existence of a working class in Britain as an institutionalised social presence and political force.⁵³ These changes provide a context to

⁵³ See Jones (2011) for a recent, though journalistic rather than academic, account of this decline of the working class in Britain.

Sivanandan's observations regarding the particular effects of multiculturalism on a politicised black identity, and clearly, as I've said, these broader changes have no immediately obvious connection with multiculturalism as a local response to a particular set of urban conflicts and broader equality issues regarding minority groups. In other words, the fragmenting effect of multiculturalism observed by Sivanandan cannot be said to have caused the decline of the working class more broadly speaking. However, neither, I believe, should we think that multiculturalism arises as a simple effect of an already-changed terrain. We can perhaps describe the link in terms of the dislocated context in which multiculturalism began to operate. In other words, the decline – or perhaps, more accurately, active dismantling – of the working class, and the broader changes to the post-war social consensus behind this decline, profoundly disrupted social relations. This enabled a reorganisation of these relations brought under the more general term neoliberalism, together with the role played by multiculturalism. More specifically the latter has helped develop an idea of social equality and social justice that no longer has the working class as its central concern – or even, as I will try to show, as a concern at all.

3.3 The Dynamic Nature of Multiculturalism and the Incorporation of Critique

The third development I want to look at is the ability of multiculturalism itself to change and evolve over time as a hegemonic operation, in other words, its dynamic nature as an evolving ideology. It is this that can help explain *how* it is able to develop a new idea of social equality and justice adapted to the changed neoliberal terrain that I've just mentioned. There are two main features of this to consider: firstly, the ability of multiculturalism to expand and incorporate new interests and demands pitched at a framework that arose initially in response to a more specific context; secondly, its ability to respond to criticisms, weaknesses and points of failure. The first will be largely traced through the case studies themselves as the range of different organisations considered, from the world of business to trade unions to race and gender equality NGOs, illustrates this point well. Here, I will focus on the second feature and the role played by two criticisms more specifically: 1) the critique of the concept of

identity at work in multiculturalism; 2) the anti-racist critique that accuses multiculturalism of replacing concern about racism with the nurturing of cultural differences.

Perhaps the most common criticism levelled at multiculturalism concerns the concept of identity it works with.⁵⁴ The argument is that by promoting certain minority identities, other differences, cutting across those identities, tend to be neglected and/or absorbed into a one-dimensional picture in which 'society is made up of a series of distinct, uniform cultures which dance around one another' (Malik's words, citing Amartya Sen, 2009: 70); or, as Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (1992: 158) put it, multiculturalism: 'constructs society as composed of a hegemonic homogeneous majority, and small unmeltable minorities with their own essentially different communities and cultures which have to be understood, accepted, and basically left alone'. However, as I will show in the following chapters, a key feature of the case studies is the way in which this criticism seems to have been incorporated into the operation of equality and diversity: the assumed complexity of identity, the way in which other identities and struggles cut across any particular group is a very common feature of the texts.⁵⁵

The incorporation of this critique can be seen in the development of a theory of intersectionality. Judith Squires (2005: 8) has drawn attention to this aspect of multicultural discourse: she notes the emergence, first of all, of a critique of identity that argues that the 'work of recognition theorists proceeds from an assumption of a readily identifiable, homogeneous, singular essence, which leaves little space for explanation of intra-group differences'. The theory of

⁵⁴ See Modood (2007, chapter five) for a discussion of the theoretical issues that arise from this criticism.

⁵⁵ Of course, this may be simple rhetoric that masks the reality of the policies pursued and their effect on people's ideas about human identity. As Malik argues of multiculturalism more generally: '[f]or all the talk about culture as fluid and changing, multiculturalism invariably leads people to think of human cultures in fixed terms' (2005). It should be noted in this regard that it is clearly a limitation of my focus on equality and diversity *texts* – in order to explore the political and ideological dynamic of multiculturalism – that I cannot pursue in more depth the links and potential gaps between language and policy, between rhetoric and the way in which multicultural ideas are taken up in concrete settings and their effects on practical politics. I do however return to this issue in the concluding chapter and offer some thoughts on this question. In this chapter, despite the validity of this point, my focus is on the possibility of multiculturalism being able to adapt and change in relation to a critique in order to function over time as a hegemonic ideological formation, and this, I think, can be considered somewhat separately from the issue of the potential existence, and precise nature, of a gap between the texts and the concrete policies pursued.

intersectionality arises, then, as an attempt to correct this by 'exploring the effect of in-group essentialism, in which a sub-set of a group seeks to fix the characteristics of a specific identity, marginalizing those group members who differ in other aspects of their identity' (ibid).

While, as Squires points out, it is easier to talk about 'intersectionality' in theory than in practice, it should be reiterated that from the beginning the question of ethnic minority groups was only ever one aspect of multiculturalism – though it is undoubtedly the aspect that it is most associated with and the one that I have largely focused on in this chapter. Feminist demands, which clearly cut across ethnic identities, have also played an important role in its development. Southall Black Sisters (SBS), for example, is a well-known group, formed in 1979, that has campaigned for women's rights and against racism and discrimination. It has also, as Malik (2009: 173) notes, been outspoken in its criticism of religious fundamentalism and against the assumption that local community leaders of ethnic or religious groups necessarily represent everyone in that community. In line with this aim, SBS helped found Women Against Fundamentalism in the period following the declaration of the fatwa against Salman Rushdie in 1989. More generally, as a group, it has clearly played an important role in the development of equality and diversity in Britain.⁵⁶

While this critique of identity has largely come from within the multicultural field, broadly speaking, the anti-racist critique of multiculturalism is interesting in the sense that its impulse arises from a more radical, oppositional position. The anti-racist critique is clearly discernible in both Malik and Sivanandan's criticisms of multiculturalism, and has already been elaborated to a certain extent above. Anthias and Yuval-Davis similarly describe how this critique 'organized around the unifying notion of "Blackness", and saw in multiculturalism a divisive mechanism, a distraction from the focus on the differential power relations, discrimination and disadvantages of Black people'. Both the

⁵⁶ It is also worth noting the importance to the functioning of multicultural ideology of the equivalence drawn between race/ethnicity and other social characteristics in terms of the inequality faced by different oppressed groups. Randall Hansen (2000: 227) for example, records what he describes as a 'smart strategic move' by Roy Jenkins to help get potentially controversial race equality legislation, contained in the 1976 Race Relations Act, through parliament by linking the measures proposed with a similar set of measures already passed for women – measures the Conservative party had backed. The Conservatives therefore 'found it difficult to oppose analogous measures for ethnic minorities'.

rise of Black Power in the USA (which I have already mentioned above) and the successful anti-colonial movements in former British territories are cited as key influences, and gives an indication of the anti-systemic impulse of anti-racism, as a movement in Britain (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992: 159). Conversely, a connection can be drawn between the British adoption of multiculturalism and Britain's colonial legacy: as Anthias and Yuval-Davis argue, the multicultural model, as a response to the failure of assimilation, was one

which particularly suited the first generation of British 'Race Relations Experts', who got their training in the colonial and missionary machine of the British empire; there they ruled through a stratum of local leaders and chieftains without too much intervention in the 'internal affairs' of those they ruled, unless they were in conflict with their interests in the area (ibid: 158-9).

When it came to 'race relations' closer to home the 'Community Relations' boards and councils (the institutional forerunners to the CRE [Commission for Racial Equality]) similarly sought to incorporate minority groups 'indirectly', with the latter represented by leaders of the 'various religious and cultural organizations' of the newly-arrived immigrants (ibid: 159).⁵⁷

Whether or not such a clear connection can be made with Britain's colonial past, it is not hard to see how early versions of multiculturalism were ripe for criticism for its lack of any real challenge to the inequality and oppression faced by minority groups. The field of educational policy was a major battleground here with the anti-racist critique arguing that what was needed was to teach pupils less about cultural diversity and more about the deep-rooted structures of discrimination and disadvantage that black people faced. Anthias and Yuval-Davis continue: '[r]ather than just teaching pupils about their own culture and other pupils' cultures, anti-racist policies were concerned with employing more Black teachers and taking out racist ideological elements from majority curricula' (ibid: 160). Roger Hewitt (2005: 147-8) cites criticisms from a number of authors in the early 1980s who argued along similar lines, such as Chris Mullard and Maureen Stone. The latter, for example, argued that

⁵⁷ Malik (1996: 170-3) has drawn a connection, more generally, between the colonial experience and the rise of the idea of cultural pluralism in Western societies.

By focussing on self-esteem, it [multicultural education] manages to ignore the vast body of evidence showing that working-class and black families have much less access to power, to resources of every kind, than middle-class children. 'Self-concept' becomes a way of evading the real, and uncomfortable, issue of class and privilege in our society (ibid: 148).⁵⁸

This critique was taken up during the 1980s by certain radical educational authorities, and despite the criticisms that it faced and its eventual demise in this particular, radicalised, form (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992: 160), it clearly had an impact on the evolution of multicultural education.

In wider society, Anthias and Yuval-Davis describe similar changes taking place in the development of the 'Race Relations Industry', which 'expanded considerably' due to the increased funding it received from the government during this same period (the 1980s). From this emerged the kind of anti-racist, and importantly *redistributive*, initiatives that I focus on in the following chapters: 'contract compliance',⁵⁹ positive action, ethnic monitoring and 'outreach community work'. Anthias and Yuval-Davis also note the rise of black people during this time to positions of power in Race Relations organisations, but also the public sector and politics more generally. The most important factor for the authors behind these developments – and for my discussion here – is what they describe as an 'entryist' strategy, by a 'new generation of Black militant intelligentsia', to seek to occupy prominent professional and political positions within the social structure, while bringing with them a radical critique of racism. The authors observe that as 'many of them had earlier been active in grass-roots movements, they brought with them the organizing principle of Blackness and incorporated it into the multi-culturalist model of the Race Relations organizations as they found them' (ibid: 161-2). Clear evidence, then, of the ability of multiculturalism to absorb a critique that initially arose in opposition to it, but which then came to influence its later development.

⁵⁸ It is worth noting, in relation to my discussion in the previous section, the close connection between the issues of race and class here. As Hewitt notes: it is 'interesting that both Mullard and Stone specifically mention the predicament of white working-class and black groups as closely related. This kind of association became later not only lost but, worse still, any concern with the issue of class was taken to be a symptom of racism' (ibid: 148).

⁵⁹ Now more commonly known as 'procurement' – it makes equality policies on the part of businesses a condition of winning government contracts.

In summary, Hewitt (2005: 148) has argued that the anti-racist critique 'came to impact on the prevailing model of multiculturalism in the UK during the 1980s, giving it a much greater emphasis on anti-racism and issues of racial equality'. Modood (2007: 41) has similarly argued that 'anti-colour racism' (his term for the earlier anti-racism that was critical of multiculturalism) 'has been a key critical element in the evolution of multiculturalism. The fact of racism and of power inequalities tended to be ignored by early conceptions of multiculturalism and came to be rightly rectified in later formulations'. In this sense we might add a more nuanced historical (and, as I will come to describe, geographical) dimension to our understanding of how multiculturalism developed in response to inequalities. While I noted above three aspects of the multicultural policies that Malik describes (the recognition of difference, the provision of resources, the promotion of social and political equality for minority groups), it can be argued that those elements emerge in a historically uneven way. While equality is clearly present in the early history of multiculturalism,⁶⁰ it is nonetheless a conception of equality that is much less substantive than the increasingly radicalised, more redistributive version that marks the later development of multiculturalism in Britain. Perhaps the most striking illustration of this point lies in the changing status of 'institutional racism'. This issue is an important aspect of Sivanandan's (1990: 85) critique of multiculturalism, as the latter's neglect of it allows him to criticise the equality policies that emerged alongside the 'divisive culturalism' for which multiculturalism is – certainly among its critics – better known. Twenty years on and the concept is firmly entrenched within the equality and diversity field as a taken-for-granted reality.⁶¹

As indicated above, it is also worth mentioning briefly the specificity of the British case in relation to other countries. Hewitt (2005: 132) suggests that multiculturalism has two points of origin: the race equality policies that emerged in the United States in the 1960s (with the extension of these policies to other

⁶⁰ Roy Jenkins famously defined integration in 1966 'not as a flattening process of assimilation, but as *equal opportunity*, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance' (quoted in Pitcher, 2007: 42 – my emphasis).

⁶¹ It first emerged in a prominent, public way with the Macpherson report (1999) and the enquiry into the murder of Stephen Lawrence and the subsequent police mishandling of the investigation. There is obviously an evolutionary process in the 'drift' of race equality policy and legislation in relation to this question however, with the introduction of 'positive action' and the recognition of 'indirect discrimination' in the 1976 Race Relations Act being one obvious milestone in this regard (see Solomos, 1989: 6-8 and Bleich, 2003: 101-7 for a discussion of this act). I discuss the legislative developments in relation to equality and diversity in detail in chapter six.

types of inequality such as gender and disability), and the management of relations between settled, immigrant and indigenous populations.⁶² While the former has played a key role in the development of multiculturalism in the United States from the beginning, it was only something that '*came to be* reflected in the UK version' (ibid – my emphasis). Furthermore, in Canada and Australia it played little part, reflecting the peculiarities of the issues faced by those countries in the post-war period.

Both the anti-racist critique of multiculturalism and the critique of multicultural identities have been followed by more recent concerns about socio-economic inequality and social cohesion: the central charge in both cases is that multiculturalism is either directly generating or, at the very least, not helping either problem, and in both cases we see clear shifts in the equality and diversity framework in response. As more recent developments, these are clearly registered within the case studies to follow so I have not included them here. However, it is worth adding that they show the continuing ability of multiculturalism – not just in its earlier phase but as a more fully developed form – to incorporate different criticisms directed at it and to respond flexibly to these different pressures as they arise.

3.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on three developments that help set the context for the case studies to come: the response to civil disturbances on the part of local councils; the decline of class registered as the loss of both an institutionalised working-class identity as well as a political black identity that appeared to have an inherent 'class dimension'; finally, the dynamic nature of multicultural ideology in responding to criticism. As I've said, the aim here has not been to provide a comprehensive history, but to pick out those historical features that provide the best context for the case study findings. These themes then – of conflict and integration, class, and ideological change – are all central to the developments that I trace in the following chapters.

⁶² Modood (2007: 1-3) makes a similar distinction.

Chapter Four: The Framework

In this chapter I will present the discourse of equality and diversity as a basic model or ideological framework that can be identified across the case studies. The concept of a framework is used as a synonym for Laclau's term, myth: a set of concepts, produced in response to social discord, that provides a model of social harmony that aims to meet the various conflicting demands giving rise to that discord; this model then serves to guide the concrete policies enacted on the ground. What Laclau captures with the addition of the concept of social imaginary is the expansion and universalisation of the myth – a phenomenon I trace, in relation to equality and diversity, in the following chapters.

In order to do this, I will use two of the case studies drawn from civil society – Runnymede and Fawcett – as the texts produced by both organisations represent relatively 'pure' forms of the equality and diversity discourse. By this I mean that the aims of both organisations (race and gender equality respectively) are met through a straightforward promotion of the framework itself. This contrasts with the other organisations that I will look at whose goals include, in different ways, interests outside the framework and who relate to it, therefore, in a somewhat more instrumental fashion. Both organisations also have a history that precedes the emergence of equality and diversity in its contemporary form; this helps us to grasp the specificity of the discourse by teasing out the change in meaning that the two central terms (equality and diversity) undergo through their later, multicultural, combination.

I will start with the multicultural idea, put forward in the Runnymede discourse, of a society made up of a number of diverse communities – relatively coherent social groups that display a unique cultural identity that deserves 'recognition' of some kind within a broader nation-state. However, in order to understand the specificity of equality and diversity we need to understand how this idea of difference becomes linked to the issue of inequality. In the second section, then, I trace the historical evolution of the idea of difference through the Fawcett texts in order to bring out its changing relationship with the concept of equality. In the final section I focus on class: the widely noted blind-spot of the framework. A

look at both case studies allows us to make some initial observations that show that it is not the absence of class, as such, from the framework, but the specific form in which it appears that is significant.

Before I take a closer look at the texts it is worth saying something about the two case study organisations themselves. According to an interview with Heidi Mirza (a prominent academic in the equality and diversity field), Runnymede⁶³ was initially set up after two law students (Anthony Lester and Jim Rose) visited the United States in 1968, at the height of the unrest that was taking place at that time over the issue of race. Having been 'very taken with [the] powerful black uprising' they witnessed, they brought the ideas accompanying that movement back to Britain (Mirza, n.d.). It is worth noting, however, that it was the more moderate end of those ideas that they brought back: as an organisation Runnymede has always been close to government, campaigning for change through lobbying and advising, rather than opposing, the government of the day.

Runnymede describes itself as a 'leading independent think tank on ethnicity and cultural diversity', with the aim of promoting, what it calls, a 'successful multi-ethnic Britain' through challenging racial discrimination and campaigning for equality (see, for example, Berkeley, 2004: 16). Much of the literature they produce is in the form of fairly short reports and briefings, the subjects of which are varied; they include, for example: reports of conferences organised on specific government agendas, investigations into particular areas of inequality such as education or financial exclusion, or studies of a particular community (e.g. the Bolivian community in London – Sveinsson, 2007). However, as an organisation, they have also been involved in producing book length reports, some of which have become well-known texts within the field: *Colour and Citizenship* (Rose, 1969), for example, was an early riposte to the rise of Enoch Powell and his anti-immigration politics (Middlesex University, n.d.); *The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain* (henceforth shortened to 'the Parekh Report', CFMEB, 2000) was, in turn, intended as a follow-up to this earlier book.⁶⁴ The Parekh

⁶³ The name comes from the town in Surrey where the Magna Carta was signed.

⁶⁴ An attempt to update and extend it, according to McLaughlin and Neal (2004: 158).

Report is a particularly significant text:⁶⁵ its key vision, Britain as a 'community of communities', captures the central idea that, as I say, multiculturalism is best known for. I therefore draw heavily on this report along with other Runnymede texts in the first section of this chapter.

Like Runnymede, Fawcett is a well-known organisation within the equality and diversity field. The organisation describes itself as the 'UK's leading campaign for equality between women and men' (Fawcett, n.d.). Its vision is of a 'society in which women and men are equal partners at home, at work and in public life' (see, for example, Brittain et al, 2005: inside front cover). Founded originally in 1866 as the London Society for Women's Suffrage, the initial goal, as the name suggests, was to achieve the vote for women. However the group later became the London and National Society for Women's Service, signalling a move to broader issues of equality between men and women. The group was given its present name in 1953 honouring a prominent campaigner for women's rights, the late Dame Millicent Fawcett (Fawcett, 1976: 1). In accounts of their history it is observed that, in relation to the campaign for women's suffrage, the group clearly differentiated itself from the more militant and radical wing of that movement; it is fair to say that they, like Runnymede, continue to represent quite a moderate line in relation to the issues around which they campaign. The texts produced by Fawcett cover a variety of issues to do with gender equality, covering areas such as: the 'gender gap' in pay between men and women, the under-representation of women in politics and business, the treatment of women in the justice system, and the particular inequalities suffered by ethnic minority women. The sample of Fawcett texts taken include a number from each decade since the 1960s, allowing some useful observations regarding the changing nature of equality discourse. I focus specifically on these historical shifts in dealing with the relationship between equality and diversity in the second section of this chapter.

⁶⁵ Malik (2009: 63) claims that it has 'come to be seen as defining the essence of multiculturalism', and Modood (2007: 17) describes it as the 'best public policy statement on multiculturalism in Britain'.

4.1 A 'Community of Communities'

If there was a single phrase or slogan that could sum up multiculturalism as a political movement it might well be this idea, first put forward in the Parekh Report, of envisioning the development of Britain as a 'community of communities' (CFMEB, 2000: 3). What exactly is meant by this phrase though? What is a 'community', and what does it mean for Britain, which is itself a community, to contain a number of different communities?

Starting with the question of definition, the Parekh Report, quoting the *Oxford English Dictionary*, defines a community very broadly as 'a body of people having a religion, a profession, etc, in common...a fellowship of interests...a body of nations unified by common interests'. Examples of 'everyday usage' are then given: 'the local community', 'the disabled community', 'a mining community', 'the scientific community', 'the gay and lesbian community', 'the two communities in Northern Ireland'. The report then goes on to 'envisage Britain as a community whose three principal constituent parts are England, Scotland and Wales, and to envisage each of the constituent parts as a community, as also each separate region, city, town or borough. Any one individual belongs to several different communities' (ibid: 47).

This definition is simple enough, but also says very little in relation to the actual meaning of the phrase in question. Any complex, large-scale society, at any point in its history, clearly contains different interest groups in this sense and is therefore a 'community of communities'. Another Runnymede report is somewhat more specific:

The Report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain developed two main ideas – of citizenship based on human rights, mutual respect and of reciprocal responsibilities; and of a 'community of communities' in which a range of communities – *especially but not only those based on race, ethnicity, culture or religion* – are able to retain their individual identity but with a sense of 'common belonging' to a single country or nation' (Faulkner, 2004: 2 – my emphasis).

It is worth noting that the different types of community mentioned here explicitly includes 'race'. Does this idea, that communities 'based on race' should be

encouraged to 'retain' their identity, confirm the suspicions of critics such as Michaels (2006: 21-49) and Malik (1996: 169-177, 2008) that there is a process of racialisation at work within multicultural ideology? What about the other characteristics named, such as culture and religion, are they merely proxy terms for race?

The key concept here is undoubtedly 'ethnicity', as it bridges the gap between 'race' on the one hand, and terms such as 'culture' and 'religion' on the other; in other words, it has a 'family resemblance' with 'race', but it aims to signify something less objective and biological than the latter.⁶⁶ Again, there is a definition of the term in the Parekh Report: 'an ethnic group is one whose members have common origins, a shared sense of history, a shared culture and a sense of collective identity. All human beings belong to an ethnic group in this sense' (CFMEB, 2000: xxiii). Here we get to the heart of multicultural ideology with its central notion of a 'shared culture' in opposition to a more objective, biological understanding of social differences. In this sense, use of the term 'race' is 'unhelpful...to the extent that it reflects and perpetuates the belief that the human species consists of separate races'. On the other hand, the term continues to be of 'essential importance, since it refers to the reality of racism' (ibid: xxiv). In terms of the logic of the discourse, then, race is a necessary term *only* in relation to the question of inequality and oppression – and this is to be distinguished from the idea of cultural or ethnic difference, which simply refers to the ebb and flow of human differences as they appear in all their variety in historically-evolving societies. It is this important discursive distinction that gives us the phrase common in Runnymede texts: 'race equality and cultural diversity'.

In a related sense, it is worth noting that in its depiction of diverse ethnic minority communities, the Parekh Report is careful to emphasise that they should not be considered *homogenous* in any sense, or *separate* entities in relation to other communities. In chapter two, for example, it is argued that while in the past 'British national identity has always been more diverse than it is normally imagined to be', in more recent times it has become particularly 'complex' due to a number of factors which have 'shaken the unified conception

⁶⁶ Malik (1996: 174-7) provides a useful discussion of the term.

of Britishness hitherto taken for granted and have injected a sense of fluidity and uncertainty into what was formerly experienced by many as a settled culture' (ibid: 23). Furthermore, one of these factors responsible for recent change, post-war migration,⁶⁷ has 'raised many questions' about 'British identity and British institutions', and has led to the central question: '[h]ow are the new communities to be viewed in relation to the nation?'. The answer is worth quoting at length:

One customary approach, which co-exists with the dominant version of the national story outlined above, is to see them as bounded, homogeneous groupings, each fixedly attached to its ethnicity and traditions. The 'majority', by the same token, is imagined to be fixed, unified, settled... There are two things wrong with this mental picture of a large homogeneous majority and various equally homogeneous minorities. First, Britain is not and never has been the unified, conflict-free land of popular imagination. There is no single white majority. Second, the 'minority' communities do not live in separate, self-sufficient enclaves, and they do display substantial internal differences. They too must be reimagined (ibid: 26).

This certainly seems a long way, then, from the charge of critics such as Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1992: 158), as cited in the previous chapter, that multiculturalism 'constructs society as composed of a hegemonic homogeneous majority, and small unmeltable minorities with their own essentially different communities and cultures'.

If the diverse communities central to the multicultural imaginary are not conceived as either homogenous or separate, how are they conceived in the literature? What captures their specificity as *multicultural* differences? To help point us towards an answer it is perhaps worth comparing the Parekh Report to an earlier Runnymede text, *Employment of Minorities in Britain* (Stewart, 1975). What is noticeable in the latter text is that the existence of cultural diversity is clearly recognised, in the sense of an acknowledgement of minority groups bringing over to Britain different cultures and cultural practices. For instance, in the first chapter, 'Who are the Immigrants?' (which covers similar ground to the section of the Parekh Report I have just summarised), the author writes, after

⁶⁷ The other factors include: globalisation, growing integration with Europe, devolution, and changing social and cultural relations (the 'rapid advance of social pluralism').

describing the long history of immigration into Britain, that '[a]ll these minorities have made their contribution to social and working life in Britain, in some cases bringing and retaining their individual cultures and forming tight-knit groups, in others merging with the British population' (ibid: 1-2). Here, the reality is understood as one where both the retention of a different culture within British society and its assimilation are possible, and the outcome depends on the particular group in question.

Further on, in a sub-section on 'Asians', there is a focus on the many different groups that make-up this group in Britain (i.e. those from the Punjab, Pakistan, Bangladesh, East Africa and so on). Stewart then writes: '[t]hese groups have strongly differentiated backgrounds in terms of experience and culture, which are represented in differences in work background, name systems and religion'. She also mentions that in 'all cases there is a strong sense of community and family, with a great respect for older people' (ibid: 8). Compare this with the Parekh Report, where under the sub-heading "'Asian" communities' it states that: 'Asians are not a single group. The conventional terminology blurs critical distinctions between Bangladeshis, Gujaratis, Pakistanis and Punjabis; between South Asians, East African Asians and Chinese; and between Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs. South Asians vary significantly not only in terms of nationality and religion but also in terms of language, caste and class...Traditions of origin are strongest in familial, personal, domestic and religious contexts, where there is a strong sense of extended kinship' (CFMEB, 2000: 30). These two descriptions of those with Asian origins are then very similar. One point of possible divergence however lies in the sentence that follows in the Parekh Report: '[i]n consequence, a stereotype has arisen of Asians being distinctively conservative, but in fact there is much *internal diversity* in Asian communities...Traditions and beliefs are varied and dynamic, constantly reinterpreted according to circumstances' (ibid: 30-1 – my emphasis). This certainly contrasts with the earlier Runnymede text in which minority communities tend to either blend into the existing population or else form 'tight-knit' groups; in the Parekh Report these communities are both relatively distinct from the majority population and also themselves contain difference. In other words, the differences in the later text do not refer to homogeneous cultural blocks, but rather serve to distinguish internally heterogeneous communities.

There are two further points to make here. Firstly, it is worth turning briefly to the theory of multiculturalism and an important distinction made by Will Kymlicka that is picked up by Kenan Malik (2008):

Kymlicka draws a distinction between the 'existence of a culture' and 'its 'character' at any given moment'. The character of culture can change but such changes are only acceptable if the existence of that culture is not threatened. But how can a culture exist if that existence is not embodied in its character? By 'character' Kymlicka seems to mean the actuality of a culture: what people do, how they live their lives, the rules and regulations and institutions that frame their existence. So, in making the distinction between character and existence, Kymlicka seems to be suggesting that Jewish, Navajo or French culture is not defined by what Jewish, Navajo or French people are actually doing. For if Jewish culture is simply that which Jewish people do or French culture is simply that which French people do, then cultures could never decay or perish [a warning that Kymlicka issues] – they would always exist in the activities of people.

In other words there is a key distinction in the theory of multiculturalism between the character or content of a particular culture or set of cultural practices, and the existence or form of that culture that can remain – or has a reality – over-and-above the changing nature of those practices. In the Runnymede texts I've looked at, the focus in the 1970s is perhaps best seen as a focus on the *character* of different cultures brought over through immigration, which may or may not retain that character in relation to the host country. In the Parekh Report, however, we find a stress on the internal diversity of different cultural communities, suggesting a shift to a focus on the importance of the *existence* of a culture able to 'contain' diverse and changing social practices.⁶⁸

Secondly, we can turn to the more concrete policies pursued in the name of multiculturalism. We saw in the previous chapter that the policies that occurred in the 1980s were considerably more complex than the phrase 'recognition of difference' generally brings to mind. I noted three aspects of the policies, with the provision of material goods, and social and political equality, existing

⁶⁸ I also emphasised in the second chapter a similar distinction that applies to language in Laclau's theory of discourse: language as content – a particular set of social practices that exist alongside political, economic, cultural practices, and so on – and language as a social form, a way of understanding the coherence of a society over time.

alongside cultural recognition. What we saw was not simply the demand for recognition of specific cultural practices by minority communities, then, but the use of cultural differences to establish a relationship between a disadvantaged community and the state.

A more recent Runnymede report gives a useful illustration of what is involved here in its look at what it portrays as a relatively late newcomer to the 'community of communities': Hindus. The report is called 'Connecting British Hindus: An enquiry into the identity and public engagement of Hindus in Britain', and in the foreword Ruth Kelly (the then Labour Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government) describes the report as the 'first to be commissioned with a specific focus on capturing an insight into the aspirations and contributions of Hindu communities in Britain'. She continues by elaborating on what the state will gain from it: '[t]he research will allow Government and its agencies to access evidence based research which specifically identifies service needs from the Hindu communities' perspective. I hope this will assist service providers in understanding the needs of Hindu communities in Britain and to feed this knowledge into tailoring public services appropriately' (Berkeley, 2006: inside front cover). The author of the report, Rob Berkeley (the current director of Runnymede), elaborates on what the community in question will gain from this articulation of social needs: the 'processes for building a sense of community around contested formations of identity is a political and social project that could enable people from Hindu backgrounds to work more effectively together for their needs'. We also get a further indication of the constructed nature of the sense of community in question, when he writes that the 'process of developing a sense of fellow feeling, mutuality and belonging will take a commitment of time and effort, but also some capacity building to be able to engage with others outside of immediate community links' (ibid: 11).

There are also some useful passages on the ongoing management of this relationship between state and community. In other words, the responsibility for change does not lie simply with the state in terms of creating a space for the communities within British society, it also lies with the communities themselves. In this sense, faith communities are 'required to have the capacity to...engage with agendas presented to them by government' as well as be able to 'define

the needs of their communities' (ibid: 7), and this requires '[b]uilding the capacity to address intergenerational changes and to use the existing expertise within the Hindu community to reinterpret Hindu values, beliefs and practices in times of social, technological, and political change' (ibid: 11). Interestingly, the kind of social and political changes that Hindu leaders are required to keep pace with include the equality and diversity agenda itself: it is argued that a 'key task for any Hindu leadership is to find ways of respecting traditions but challenging discrimination based on family background, religious tradition or jaati (caste) within a community' (ibid: 12).

What these points suggest, then, is that specifically *multicultural* differences – the diverse communities that make up the Parekh Report's vision – go much deeper than is often understood by the phrase 'cultural diversity'. What we find in the discourse is the use of culture to mark out a socially disadvantaged group identity, and the use of this identity to establish a relationship with, and make demands on, the state.

What about the community that contains these diverse communities though? What happens to this identity within the discourse? At first sight there is a symmetrical discursive operation in which Britain is argued to be, both in the past and present, 'diverse' in the same way as minority communities are diverse. This is clear from the passage cited above: Britain has never been the 'unified, conflict-free land of popular imagination' and minorities also 'display substantial internal differences'. Similarly, the report concludes, at the end of the chapter on minority communities, that 'Britishness is less unified, more diverse and pluralistic, than is normally imagined...However, migrant communities also turn out to be less unitary, more diverse and varied, than is normally imagined' (CFMEB, 2000: 36). On closer inspection, though, it is clear that there is a crucial distinction between the diversity of Britain, on the one hand, and that of minority communities on the other. A clue lies in the subtle difference in wording in the preceding quote: while minority communities are understood as less '*unitary*' (i.e. not homogenous), these differences are nonetheless internal to a relatively coherent group formation (as I have argued above). By contrast, Britain is less '*unified*' – it is the ability to contain this difference within a single national community that is placed in doubt by its diversity.

In this sense, what is emphasised in the report's rethinking of the national story is not simply the differences internal to Britain (as is the case with its description of minority communities), but the struggle and conflict that has permanently scarred the project to unify those differences – to bring them together into a coherent whole. For example, 'the primacy of parliament in Britain was achieved at the expense of civil war, a king's head, the persecution of Catholics and the crushing of revolt in Ireland' (ibid: 2000: 19); the 'Act of Union (1801), which attempted to broker Ireland into the bargain, was continually contested' (ibid: 20); 'there have always been many, often contested, ways of being British' and Britishness has always been 'strongly challenged' by the Irish, Scottish and Welsh and by a 'range of local and regional loyalties' (ibid: 22). The 'achievements now said to characterise Englishness were staunchly resisted by some English people while being vigorously championed by others...[and] were achieved only through protracted struggle'; great national achievements such as the NHS and the welfare state more generally were each 'at one time the cause of bitter struggle' (ibid: 22). Even in 'today's less politicised climate' there are not only different, but 'dramatically opposed, versions of national identity', and a 'universal sense of "Englishness" is impossible when our class system provides so many different "Englands"' (ibid: 22-3). This can be compared with a passage on Irish identity: there are 'various ways of being Irish in Scotland and England, connected with...differences of class, gender and time of migration' (ibid: 32), but these differences do not appear to be 'dramatically opposed', and differences of class do not appear to make a universal sense of Irishness 'impossible'.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ It should be noted that the report does use the term 'division', rather than just 'difference', at least twice in the discussion of minority groups: in the section on Asian communities it mentions 'deep divisions between parents and their children about the dangers of assimilation' within those communities, and, similarly, the 'many significant divisions and differences among British Jewry'. However, as I've argued, the divisions in this context don't seem to put the overall unity into question as divisions within Britain do. Another illustration of this point is that the differences within the Jewish or Asian community do not have one particular element within them which is dominant over the others, and which therefore puts into question the potential neutrality of Jewishness or Asianness as an overarching identity containing these differences. In the story of Britain, not just whiteness (as we will come to below) but also Englishness has always been dominant (e.g. ibid: 21), preventing Britain from neutrally containing its differences in the same way as these ethnic minority communities.

At the heart of this asymmetry in the significance of diversity for minority and majority communities lies one particular blockage to a unified British identity that is clearly predominant: racism. In the concluding section of the two chapters I have been looking at, the report adds a cautionary note to the optimistic claim that – having argued that both Britishness and migrant communities are diverse – the 'prospect of all communities finding a better, more just and humane way of living together has improved in the recent past':

as we show in many chapters of this report, Britain continues to be disfigured by racism; by phobias about cultural difference; by sustained social, economic, educational and cultural disadvantage; by institutional discrimination; and by a systematic failure of social justice or respect for difference. These have been fuelled by a fixed conception of national identity and culture (ibid: 36).

While by 'social, economic, educational and cultural disadvantage' they undoubtedly mean not just race but other inequalities such as class and gender, it is racism that poses a fundamental *threat* to society in a unique way. We saw in the previous chapter that the Scarman report argued that racial disadvantage could become an 'endemic, ineradicable disease threatening the very survival of our society' (quoted in Malik, 2009: 57). There are further examples of this type of argument in more recent Runnymede texts. For example, in the introduction to the report on British Hindus the author summarises the six-point framework for the research, taken from the Parekh Report, the last of which is that racism is 'deeply divisive, intolerant of differences, a source of much human suffering, and inimical to the common sense of belonging lying at the basis of every stable civilisation. It can have no place in a decent society' (Berkeley, 2006: 8). Similarly, in another Runnymede publication, Audrey Osler writes that in Britain 'as in other multicultural societies across Europe, racism remains a powerful force which not only undermines the human rights of individuals but also serves to undermine democracy itself' (Osler, 2003: v), and that racism, which 'acts as a barrier to inclusion and participation, is therefore not only undemocratic, but also the enemy of democracy, threatening the stability and social cohesion of our society' (ibid: vii). In contrast, the other inequalities, such as gender inequality and economic disadvantage, do not threaten the very foundations of society in this way.

There is a final point to make here: it is not just racism in general but specifically *white* racism that holds this particular place in the discourse. In discussing whether there is a 'future' for Britishness, and pointing to the potential for a 'suitably qualified' identity for ethnic minorities (e.g. Black British, Indian British etc), the following argument is made in the Parekh Report, in what proved to be a highly controversial passage:⁷⁰

However, there is one major and so far insuperable barrier. Britishness, as much as Englishness, has systematic, largely unspoken, racial connotations. Whiteness nowhere features as an explicit condition of being British, but it is widely understood that Englishness, and therefore by extension Britishness, is racially coded... Race is deeply entwined with political culture and with the idea of nation, and underpinned by a distinctively British kind of reticence – to take race and racism seriously, or even to talk about them at all, is bad form, something not done in polite company (CFMEB, 2000: 38).

In a section on the history of racism the report argues that racism is a universal phenomenon: it 'has existed and continues to exist in all societies. Chinese and Indian attitudes to outsiders, and African attitudes to Asians, and so on' (ibid: 63). There is therefore no reason to think that racism in Britain is considered by Runnymede to be a solely white phenomenon, more generally; however, in terms of the deep, structural, 'systematic' racism that underpins the discourse, and which presents an antagonistic threat to a unified Britain, it clearly is.

4.2 The Changing Meanings of 'Equality' and 'Diversity'

It is clear, then, from the Runnymede discourse that the idea of difference in multicultural discourse is a complex one; there is also a similarly complex relationship between difference and inequality – particularly racism, which has a uniquely threatening character. In order to understand the specific nature of an

⁷⁰ See McLaughlin and Neal (2004: 159-161) on the hostile media response to the publication of the report. In particular, this response denounced the idea, seemingly put forward by the report, that a British identity is implicitly racist in some way. Defences of the report argue that this is a misinterpretation that ignores some crucial distinctions in terminology. Fortier (2005: 563), for example, argues that '[m]issing the nuance between "racial connotations" and "racism", journalists consistently misrepresented and misquoted the report as rendering "British" *inherently* racist (as opposed to historically racist)'.

equality and diversity framework we need to investigate this relationship more closely. The Fawcett Society texts allow us a useful historical picture of the changing meanings of these two terms (equality and diversity), and how they interact within the same organisational discourse.

Starting with the Fawcett discourse in the 1960s we can note that the concept of diversity appears twice in two texts, both of which are reports of conferences held by the Fawcett Society in 1967 and 1969. In the summing-up of the 1967 conference, the speaker (Miss Hilton) is reported as saying that:

perhaps all through the Conference we had fallen into the error of generalising about what women are and what women think and want. We were in fact as various, perhaps even more so, than men....it was surely the aim of education to enable people to be their best selves. Among the 'best selves' of men and women there would be an enormous diversity of points of view, likes, dislikes and ability and the kind of patterns they wanted to make of life.

In the old days it was essential that feminist organisations should assume that all women wanted or should want a particular brand of freedom. This was necessary to achieve such freedom, and now it has been achieved (Fawcett, 1967: 19).

Further on, she notes that at 'one time a number of objective thinkers had got together during the war years and tried to thrash out what was the feminine point of view if such existed...they failed to establish the existence of a feminine point of view as such, the diversity was so great' (ibid: 21).

At the 1969 conference a speaker on 'Women and Management' is reported to have argued the case for women managers in terms of what women, as a gender, can bring to the task:

The main qualities called for [in management] were patience, flexibility, sympathy and empathy with people, all feminine qualities. Provided women were not content just to copy men, they should be excellent managers. Certainly, professional qualifications were important, but they had to be combined with the feminine qualities which were badly needed in the business world today.

Differences between men and women should not be played down; richness of diversity was the condition of a creative society...Women, with their concern for the individual, with their intuitive feeling for unity and harmony had something unique to offer to the business world (Fawcett, 1969b: 21).

We can see here two different uses of the term 'diversity' that are worth specifying: 1) in the first quote, from the first speaker, the term is used in the sense of individual differences, i.e. differences internal to a social group of some kind – in this case, women; 2) the second speaker uses the term to refer to group differences – women, as a group, are thought to possess certain 'feminine qualities'. While the term 'diversity' is not itself used, we can also note a third type of difference that will help in understanding the later equality and diversity discourse: in the second quote from the first speaker, a politicised social difference is necessary as a temporary strategy – in other words, in order to achieve a political goal such as freedom for women, certain generalisations about what women want, as a distinct group, are necessary.

The concept of equality is much more central to the discourse in this earlier period (as is to be expected for a gender equality organisation). In texts from the 1960s the term clearly refers to something (like freedom in the passage above) that has, in its formal sense, already been achieved, and which has to now be 'put into practice'. At the 1969 Fawcett conference, Dr. Louis Blom-Cooper is reported as saying that:

The stage had been reached where the law, as such, would soon have done all it could to equalise men and women. It was necessary to consolidate these gains and during the next ten years attention should be devoted to putting these declared rights into practice. Women would get effective equality if they used their new-found powers wisely (ibid: 9).

In the Annual Report of 1968-69, Miss Halpin, in the Chairman's remarks, similarly states that '[t]oday our "rights" had more or less been won but the younger generation did not realise how much was involved in maintaining the position and keeping the doors of opportunity open' (Fawcett, 1969a: 2).

In the 1970s the focus shifts onto 'inequalities' – in other words, the more substantive inequality that requires remedy in the texts of the previous decade. For example, in the Annual Report at the end of that decade, the Society has as its 'principal object' the 'removal of all inequalities and discrimination based on sex, whether in law, practice or custom, and the promotion of equal opportunity in all spheres of work or other endeavour', and it 'seeks to promote education and the dissemination of knowledge on the past and present position of women and on the inequalities which have been and are imposed on them by law or custom in this country or elsewhere' (Fawcett, 1979: 1). A pamphlet written in 1972 states that: '[w]ith a view to comprehensive legislation to end the inequalities which remain, we urge that the Law Commissions in England and Scotland should jointly set up a status of women study, to identify remaining inequalities and propose legislation to abolish them effectively' (Fawcett, 1972: 2). At the same time, this work against inequalities, and for a 'true equality' (Fawcett, 1976: 1) is accompanied by a critique of a notion of difference in the sense of group distinctions (as opposed to individual differences among women). In the same pamphlet, for example, the aims of Fawcett include:

phasing out single-sex professional and business associations, societies and clubs. We are against women's divisions, associate memberships, wives' groups – as well as the relegation of women to those ancillary functions in joint organisations such as fundraising and coffee-making. There may be a place for distinct women's organisations for some years yet, but the aim should be integration and equal participation (ibid: 2).

It is worth highlighting, in the final sentence, that this critique of difference does not preclude the continuing relevance of a potentially necessary, though temporary, political difference, which may be required for 'some years yet'.

In contrast to the more optimistic tone of the 1970s⁷¹ the texts from the 1980s clearly register disappointment as those hopes begin to fade. What is noticeable

⁷¹ In the 1972 pamphlet this optimism is linked with, among other things, the emerging women's liberation movement: '[w]e believe that the women's movement has now entered a new phase, and we see the evidence for this in three encouraging developments. The Equal Pay Act has been passed. Pledges to introduce legislation to prohibit sex discrimination in certain areas (employment, for example) have appeared in the programmes of political parties. And there has recently been a ferment of discussion about the roles of men and women in society...we acknowledge gratefully the stimulus that has come from the women's liberation movement. Its grass-roots questioning of basic

in terms of the concept of equality is less a change in its meaning – it is still linked to the rectification of various inequalities in society – and more the emergence of various concrete policy measures to achieve the desired redistributive effects. In particular, the argument for policies that treat women differently in order to increase their standing as a group – such as affirmative or positive action – begins to be made quite forcefully. The report of the proceedings of a 'Women's Action Day' held in London in 1980 records a number of speakers calling for this type of intervention. For example, one speaker is reported as arguing that '[p]ositive discrimination had to begin in schools, and cover the whole spectrum of employment. Management and unions should agree on positive action, then identify the areas where women are offered dead-end, low-paid jobs while men are offered jobs with prospects' (Fawcett, 1980: 6).⁷² This finding fits with the general historical trajectory of the development of multiculturalism I outlined in the previous chapter, where this decade (the 1980s) saw the beginning of organised, institutionally backed programs (within certain local authorities) to make minority groups more equal with the majority. However, as I've mentioned, it wasn't until later that the idea of diversity becomes linked with these policies and to 'equality' in the specific combination that we find in contemporary equality and diversity texts.

We can see this last point reflected in the Fawcett discourse where 'diversity' only appears in this form in the 2000s. More specifically, I can't find the term used in this sense until the Annual Report of 2003-04 where it is stated that 'Fawcett recognises that women's lives and experiences are diverse. We campaign for changes in legislation, practice and culture that bring about real improvements for all women. Through our strong evidence-backed campaigns we stimulate debate and bring women's voices to the heart of policy making' (Fawcett, 2004: 1). It is worth noting, however, that in the Annual Report from three years earlier, while not the exact term, the concept of difference is used in a similar fashion: 'we go from strength to strength in our ability to make sure that women's voices are heard, making sure policy makers remember that women's

attitudes, its dynamism and its new perceptions have done a lot to prepare the ground for this new phase' (Fawcett, 1972: 1).

⁷² Interestingly, at this early stage no distinction is made between positive discrimination and affirmative action, on the one hand, and positive action, on the other. In contrast, this is a distinction that, as we will see, plays an important role in later texts.

needs are different' (Fawcett, 2001: 1). Once we get to the Annual Report for 2008-09, we see that the concept of 'diversity' is not only central to the Fawcett discourse, but the general promotion of equality and diversity appears to be the basic aim of the organisation, with gender equality more an emphasis within this broad agenda rather than the sole aim. That is certainly the impression given by the way they summarise their objectives in this document: '[t]he Society works to promote equality and diversity, in particular equality between women and men, and to eliminate gender discrimination for the benefit of the public' (Fawcett, 2009: 2).

In these later texts diversity appears as key to the pursuit of equality. This is illustrated well in a 2005 report called 'Black & Minority Ethnic Women in the UK':

This publication is the first that Fawcett has produced focusing exclusively on the position of Black and Minority Ethnic women in the UK. As an organisation, we recognise that we have fallen too readily into the trap of talking about women as if they were a homogenous group.

To achieve equality between women and men, Fawcett seeks to understand the particular experience of Black and Minority Ethnic women, diversity among Black and Minority Ethnic women as well as the commonality of experience among women of all ethnicities. This publication represents an important step on the road to addressing this agenda within our work (Brittain et al, 2005: inside front cover – my emphasis).

The emphasised phrase indicates the new role that diversity begins to play in relation to equality: it becomes a way of achieving equality, not merely something to be recognised alongside it.

What does it mean, though, for diversity to be a way of achieving equality, and what kind of diversity are we talking about? I've located three meanings of difference in the earlier Fawcett discourse: individual differences, group differences, and political distinctions. At a first glance, the contemporary turn towards diversity could be viewed as a straightforward replacement of the third meaning by the second. I quoted Malik on the early history of multiculturalism in

the previous chapter: 'temporary organizational separation for political reasons gave way to the notion of permanent cultural distinctiveness as a fact of life' (Malik, 2009: 54). In this case, 'difference' goes from denoting a political distinction (in response to inequality) to a group difference characterised by culture.

However, in looking at the contemporary texts it would seem that diversity contains elements of both these meanings, rather than one simply replacing the other. It is clear, for example, that the difference that women constitute in the later Fawcett texts is not the same as the 'feminine qualities' of the passage from the 1960s that I cited. The critique of 'stereotypes' is a constant theme in the literature generally. A Fawcett 'think piece' on the subject of stereotypes argues that

empirical evidence challenges the authority of these familiar stereotypes; showing that women and men are in fact more similar than they are different, and that there is more variation among women and among men, than between women and men. In short, gender stereotypes create a 'false dichotomy' between female and male characteristics (Rake and Lewis, 2009: 3).

Here we can see that diversity in the sense of individual differences is used to challenge the idea of natural differences between the sexes (i.e. there is more variation within the group 'women' than between 'women' and 'men').⁷³

However, this simple proposition (which few would deny) obviously cannot be isolated from the political context of inequality in which the discourse operates. In a Fawcett report on the effects of the recent recession on women, written two months later, Katherine Rake (2009: 3) writes that:

The collapse of the UK's financial institutions has had huge repercussions. One consequence has been the fact that during the collapse of our banking system the faces of leading figures were put on the front pages of every newspaper. For the first time, the public has seen for themselves who holds power in our major businesses, and they were the faces of white men...It is important that the argument about why this is a problem is made without descending into simplistic

⁷³ In a similar way, we saw above how the Parekh Report appeals to the internal diversity of minority communities in order to challenge the idea of them as 'bounded, homogeneous groupings'.

caricatures of women and men's behaviour (i.e. that men are testosterone-fuelled risk takers while women are risk averse and compassionate). We would argue that the problem lies, rather, in the fact that these institutions have drawn their senior figures from one narrow demographic.

If the problem is not enough people from a particular 'demographic', what characterises that demographic in a way that would then benefit institutions? It cannot be crude generalisations about women's naturally 'risk averse' inclinations, yet there nonetheless must be some kind of difference that a particular demographic would contribute. Rake puts the solution like this: 'women and men continue to have different life experiences and their needs and interests are often different as a consequence. Better governance comes when a rich variety of life experience is reflected among decision makers' (ibid). However, this merely leads to the question of the cause of these 'different life experiences'? Once again, if they are purely a result of inequality, the achievement of gender equality would eliminate these different life experiences and there wouldn't be a 'rich variety' at the top. Yet the phrase 'life experiences' clearly suggests something to do with the social conditions that women find themselves in, rather than any innate differences between the sexes.

Having considered this shift in the meaning of difference as it comes to be articulated with equality, I will finish this section by considering how equality itself changes as a result of this pairing. In other words, what does it mean for equality to be a way of achieving diversity? One way of thinking about the development of equality initiatives, such as positive action, in the 1980s, is that it shifts equality from entailing a structural or relational and therefore qualitative change, to one involving the quantitative comparison of groups *within* a structure or set of relations. However, as I will go on to argue in more detail in the following chapter, there is an important distinction (both historically and analytically) between equality initiatives, such as affirmative or positive action, and the later institutionalisation of these initiatives under the broader term 'diversity'. As Peter Wood points out, in the United States affirmative action was to be a temporary measure that would bring about racial equality as an 'achieved fact'. Quantitative comparisons between, say, the top positions held by whites and non-whites respectively was therefore a means to an end that still involved a qualitative shift in social relations – in moving from a racially unequal

to a racially equal society. With the advent of diversity things are not so clear: diversity 'dispensed with the old notion of equality and in so doing, dispensed with the idea that group preferences would be only a temporary expedient' (Wood, 2003: 238). Consequently, the quantitative comparison between groups becomes a permanent exercise in closing 'inequality gaps', rather than a temporary measure towards ending inequality.

Take, for example, this text from 2005: the 1970s

was a time of great optimism...there was a hope among many in the women's movement that if only they pushed hard enough they would see equality for their daughters' generation.

In this review, we look at how much has really changed 30 years later. We find that while there are many successes to celebrate, there is still a great deal further to go to close the inequality gaps between women and men (Fawcett, 2005: 2).

Compare this to the contribution of a speaker, in a debate on equal pay, at the TUC women workers conference of 1969:

Year after year we have come forward to this rostrum, urging and pleading for social justice, but it is very, very far away I am afraid, unless the women themselves take the action that is needed to show that we really mean to have equality, not in the distant future, but now (TUC, 1969: 52).

The point should be emphasised: this idea of equality as an immediate qualitative change in social relations is entirely absent from later texts. There is, instead, a kind of asymptotic approach towards equality in that while continued progress is generally acknowledged, there is no obvious sign of when equality might be achieved, no end-point that can be reached that will mean redistributive equality policies are no longer necessary.

This shift in the meaning of equality as it becomes combined with diversity – from a qualitative change in the nature of social relations to a permanent reduction of inequalities between groups within a set of social relations – also points towards a final meaning of difference that we find in the texts. This

meaning of difference describes a position within a social structure, and is therefore not simply an expression of a group characteristic of some kind (gender, ethnicity etc), but it is at the same time clearly more permanent and institutionalised than a temporary political difference. This is a difference that emerges from the recognition of an unequal group in society by the state, and the resulting space provided for it within the institutionalised workings of the system. This is a meaning that clearly came across in my analysis of the diverse communities in the Runnymede discourse. We also saw, in the discussion of the rise of ethnicity in the previous chapter, that what helped form the new ethnic differences was not the existence of ethnic difference alone, but rather the place that was found within the system for those differences as equal groups in society. Conversely, the emergence of an anti-systemic black identity, in which those differences were submerged, can be linked to the failure to incorporate ethnic groups in this way (i.e. as equals).

4.3 The Blind Spot

We have a better picture now of equality and diversity discourse as an ideological framework. As an ideological response to a fundamental inequality that threatens society, it establishes the principle of equality between social groups (measured according to various indicators of material well being,⁷⁴ but also less tangible political and 'symbolic' factors such as power-relations, recognition and status). Diversity is a crucially flexible term: in order to pursue social justice, groups have to be distinguished on both the 'horizontal' level (from each other) and the 'vertical' level (their unequal social position). However, this is a type of social justice that depends on diversity having two further possible meanings: 1) the social groups in question are non-class groups that are different on the basis of a range of characteristics (ethnicity, religion, gender, sexuality, disability, and so on); 2) this is social justice within a particular social system, giving rise to institutionalised differences within the social structure. This leads to, on the one hand, differential treatment of majority and minority in order to promote social equality, but also, at the same time, an

⁷⁴ E.g. unemployment and poverty rates, wealth, housing, job opportunities, educational achievement, health outcomes, and so on.

attempt to include *all* groups within the system: to 'address the white communities on an equal basis with others' (McLaughlin and Neal, 2004: 159).⁷⁵

I want to finish this chapter by looking at the key exclusion at the heart of this framework: class inequality. From my argument so far this seems simple enough: the social groups made equal in the model are characterised by their link to various non-class characteristics (gender, race, sexuality etc); this means that high levels of socio-economic inequality, which cuts across these groups, is, at best, compatible with this model, at worst, actively reproduced by it. However, this relationship between the framework and class is not quite as straight-forward as it might at first appear. For this reason I will not do more here than give an initial first sketch of the place of class within the discourse; the following chapters (particularly chapter seven) will significantly expand on this. I will start with the issue of class, as it emerges in the Fawcett discourse in a somewhat oblique fashion: in this organisation's defence of equality and diversity in response to the latter's right-wing critics.

As a 'means of achieving social justice in a hierarchical society',⁷⁶ the equality and diversity framework invariably gives rise to the critique from the right that the majority group – the group on the wrong end of the differential treatment institutionalised through this framework – is, in fact, becoming a disadvantaged group itself. This criticism is registered within the Fawcett discourse in their Annual Report for 2000-01: the report has the sub-title 'Banishing the Myths', which clearly indicates the need to respond to this challenge. The Chair of the organisation, Jenny Watson, argues that:

Looking back, this year seemed to be the year of the media myth – that women have it all. Girls do better at school, women have shattered the glass ceiling, and in these post-feminist days, boys and men, whose identity is so uncertain, need attention.

⁷⁵ According to McLaughlin and Neal, the original remit of the commission behind the Parekh Report (under a different chair, Sir John Burgh) was to 'look at the future of multi-ethnic Britain as a whole. It should be seen to address the white communities on an equal basis with others'. Similarly, the report itself states that the 'development of Britain as a community of communities is not about "multi-ethnic Britain" alone; it is for the benefit of all people, not just so-called minorities' (CFMEB, 2000: 9).

⁷⁶ This is a phrase used in a Runnymede text to describe the historical acceptance of reservations in public bodies for disadvantaged groups (such as Untouchables) in India (Khan, 2006: 6).

Of course we need to be concerned with boys who have problems in school, with the decline of traditional industry which has disproportionately affected men. But if women have really cracked it, why are those girls who do so well at school still being paid just 82% of their male colleagues – even less if they work part-time? Why are girls still not studying IT or engineering in anything like the same numbers as boys?...For every woman who makes it to the top – such as the handful we identified in our FTSE female report – there are thousands of others who face difficulty in balancing their work and home life and experience discrimination in the workplace (Fawcett, 2001: 1).

It is clear from this passage, though, that 'problems in school' and the 'decline of traditional industry' are not just issues that disproportionately affect men, but are also issues that disproportionately affect different social classes. In this sense the right-wing critique tends to mirror the strategy of identity politics in binding together socio-economic interests with the articulation of a non-class identity. The difference is, of course, that this identity is a majority identity – the aim being to challenge the idea of disadvantaged minorities that legitimate equality and diversity policies.

There are two main responses to this challenge that exist within the equality and diversity discourse: one is the straight-forward response, as we see above, to restate the fundamental inequality between majority and minority, shifting the ground, if necessary, away from those areas where there might be statistical indicators that do not reflect this. The second is more interesting and involves not simply rejecting the claims of unfairness, as articulated by the right-wing critique, but also attempting to break the link drawn by the latter between socio-economic issues and a majority identity. In other words, this response involves drawing a class division, within the majority, between the legitimate grievances of those suffering from the effects of the socio-economic structure, and those who are simply using those grievances to further an attack on equality and diversity. Crucially, this return of class within the discourse repeats the asymmetry between majority and minority, through the contrast between the majority group affected by this class division and the minority groups who are not.

A good illustration of this can be found in a collection of articles in a recent Runnymede publication entitled: 'Who Cares about the White Working Class?'. In her foreword, Kate Gavron – the vice-chair of the organisation – sets out the context for the collection like this:

At first sight the subject of this book may surprise readers, coming from an organization which for forty years has worked to promote a successful multi-ethnic Britain by addressing issues of racial equality and discrimination against minority communities. Seeking to examine the grievances of a part of the white majority is not an obvious development. But a recent emphasis in the media and by other commentators on the segregation of, and competition between, ethnic groups has suggested that white working class communities may be losing out in the conflict over the allocation of scarce resources. This has prompted us to ask our contributors to describe what is really happening (Gavron, 2009: 2).

The answer is that '[i]n fact, the most disadvantaged working-class people of whatever ethnic background, roughly the poorest fifth of the population, are increasingly separated from the more prosperous majority by inequalities of income, housing and education'. Gavron concludes:

What we learn here is that life chances for today's children are overwhelmingly linked to parental income, occupations and educational qualifications – in other words, class. The poor white working class share many more problems with the poor from minority ethnic communities than some of them recognize. All the most disadvantaged groups must be helped to improve their joint lot. Competition between them, real or imagined, is just a distraction (ibid).

Once again, we need to pay close attention to the discourse here. To begin with, the first quote makes it clear that the aim is to 'examine the grievances of a part of the white majority', and from the title of the publication and throughout it is clear that it is the *white* working class that is the central subject of the collection. Class is clearly registered as a modification of the fundamental, structuring majority/minority relation (a 'part of the white majority'), rather than a group that cuts across the ethnically defined 'communities' we have already looked at. In other words, the working class seems to take on an ethnic form in a similar fashion to other disadvantaged groups defined by non-ethnic characteristics, such as gender and sexuality (I mentioned this feature of

multiculturalism in the previous chapter). From the second quote it is clear that this group takes its place alongside ethnic minorities as one of the many 'disadvantaged groups' with which multiculturalism deals.

It is this reduction of a class to a disadvantaged minority that leads Walter Benn Michaels (2009), in his review of the publication, to argue that what we get from Runnymede

is less an alternative to neoliberal multiculturalism than an extension and ingenious refinement of it. Those writing in this collection understand the 're-emergence of class' not as a function of the increasing injustice of class...but as a function of the increasing injustice of 'classism'. What outrages them, in other words, is not the fact of class difference but the 'scorn' and 'contempt' with which the lower class is treated.

Terry Eagleton (1996: 57-9), among others, has similarly criticised the attempt to fit class into the multicultural schema of disadvantaged groups. The central point is that the equivalence between class and non-class inequalities fails because class is not an 'ism'. In other words, it is not about prejudice and ill-treatment of individuals according to their identity (skin colour, gender, cultural practice, sexuality etc), but rather involves an exploitative social relation that requires a fundamentally different type of politics to remedy.

While this criticism undoubtedly brings out an important distinction between class and non-class inequalities, it is important to add two points that can be missed in discussion of this question. Firstly, as we have already seen multiculturalism, from the very beginning, involves much more than the injustices Michaels identifies (prejudice, discrimination, lack of cultural recognition, stereotyping etc). There is a stronger, though undoubtedly limited, attempt to equalise the material conditions of disadvantaged groups with comparative majority groups – including the redistribution of a broad range of material resources – alongside the political project to provide institutional mechanisms for consulting and integrating those minority groups into the functioning of state power. We should be careful then not to underestimate the nature of the equality sought in the 'politics of difference'. Secondly, it is clear from my case studies that this model of social justice is quite compatible with a

critique of the injustice of socio-economic inequality as a general over-riding structure that affects all disadvantaged groups. What needs to be analysed, I think, is less an exclusion or lack of emphasis on socio-economic inequality, and more the separation within the discourse of the two types of inequality and the effect this has on each: identity-based inequality, on the one hand, to remedy which requires focusing on the inequality of a distinct, non-class group; on the other hand, socio-economic inequality, to remedy which means to reduce the overall disparities that *cut across* identity-based groups, and whose amelioration is not therefore linked to the 'recognition' of a distinct social group.

What we find, then, is that the working class as a group tends to fall between these two meanings of equality: it is a distinct, disadvantaged group, but not one of the 'identity' groups that are recognised within the equality and diversity framework. I noted in the previous chapter that Sivanandan's analysis of the ideological impact of multiculturalism was not a straightforward case of a focus on race replacing a focus on class. Rather, it was the *separation* of the two issues that was crucial. He argues, in a similar vein, that as a result of the theoretical challenge to Marxism and championing of non-class groups as agents of change in the same period, the working class 'was stripped of its richest political seams – black, feminist, gay, green etc. – and left, in the name of anti-economism, a prey to economism' (Sivanandan, 1990: 77). While clearly the kind of New Left thinking he is targeting is very different from the neoliberal multicultural discourse I am looking at, he does, I think, capture quite well what happens to an agent that was previously at the heart of the politics of inequality.

We can illustrate this point further by returning to the Runnymede collection on class. We have already noted that its main subject is the *white* working class: a kind of ethnicised class grouping whose disadvantage is clearly, as pointed out by Michaels, understood in 'culturalist' terms. For example, in his introduction to the collection, Kjartan Páll Sveinsson concludes that the 'white working classes are discriminated against on a range of different fronts, including their accent, their style, the food they eat, the clothes they wear, the social spaces they frequent, the postcode of their homes, possibly even their names. But they are not discriminated against because they are white' (Sveinsson, 2009: 6). Here the white working class is clearly depicted as a distinct identity that suffers from

the kind of direct discrimination that minority groups suffer from. However, as I noted, equality for the other non-class minority groups (such as women or the disabled) *includes* the redistribution of material resources in relation to a comparatively advantaged group. For the white working class, however, this aspect of equality falls under the more general socio-economic inequality that is distinct, in the discourse, from the remedying of group inequality; the former type of inequality does not include recognition of the kind of socio-political, culturally distinct, *subjects* that define the minority groups of multiculturalism. In this sense, then, the working class appears as either a specific group that suffers from prejudice (i.e. 'classism'), or tends to disappear in a more general attempt to rectify socio-economic inequality that cuts across *all* disadvantaged groups.

This contemporary distinction between identity-based and socio-economic inequality can be usefully contrasted to an earlier social-democratic discourse on equality in which no such distinction appears to exist. Here, the working class appears as a recognised, disadvantaged group in a way that it does not in contemporary equality and diversity texts. One consequence is that, in contrast to contemporary texts (where, as we've seen, class tends to be linked with white men whilst women and ethnic minorities are taken as groups that unproblematically form across class differences), we see the simple fact of the class-divided nature of disadvantaged minorities.

In some of the earlier Fawcett texts, for example, we see that privileged class interests within the women's movement, both in the past and present, are contrasted with the distinct interests of working-class women. In a talk given to the 1967 conference, a speaker (Professor McGregor) is reported as saying that it was the problems of 'upper and middle class' women in Victorian society that were the 'effective origin of the women's movement' and that 'involved the development of opportunities for education and professional training of women. Such women thus began to have the freedom to choose between work and the legal bondage of marriage.' In contrast:

new freedoms for the women of the working class, who always formed an important segment of the labour market, lay in the control and regulation of conditions of

work. The necessity for such controls was not understood by, and was thus generally opposed by, the largely middle and upper class women's movement (Fawcett, 1967: 5).

Further on:

Probably also the upper and middle class nature of the women's movement had been an obstacle [in the latter's progress]. It was essential to extend it to the interests of industrial women...Professor McGregor ended by stressing what he described as the inescapable fact that women have two roles; in the case of the working class woman the problem is the creation of an industrial structure which will give opportunities for responsibility and promotion (ibid: 9).

In a paper given to the Fawcett Society in 1978, David Donnison makes a similar observation of '2nd wave feminism' whose 'leaders have been predominantly middle-class'. He contrasts this with

leaders of other movements for reform in which working-class people have played so large a part – the movements, for example, which have reorganised this country's secondary education, launched at last a better pension scheme, and rehoused one-third of our population in non-profit housing allocated with greater regard for needs than for the ability to pay (Donnison, 1978: 3).

What is noticeable in these quotes is that there is nothing particularly radical about the observation of the class-divided nature of women as a group. By that I mean that in these examples the social democratic discourse is focused, like multiculturalism, on integration: both seek to incorporate disadvantaged groups within a wider social structure by improving the social conditions of those groups. The difference is simply the replacement of the working-class by various minority groups as the central agents in this process.

It isn't that the existence of non-class inequalities are not recognised in the older texts, but the lack of a separation between socio-economic and identity-based inequality means that, unlike in contemporary equality and diversity texts, there is no automatic connection between gender equality and social equality; it depends on whether or not the former aids the overall improvement in the social position of the working class and, what is an indivisible aspect of this, a

reduction in socio-economic inequality. In her opening address to the Fawcett conference of 1969, for example, Shirley Williams (a Labour MP at the time) points out that '[s]ocial justice for women was one of the questions frequently neglected by women's organisations. Equality within professions, equality of admission, equal pay, all these were recognised and fought for, but it was frequently forgotten that the bulk of women are to be found on the shop floor' (Fawcett, 1969b: 4).

4.4 Conclusion

Having already summarised the first two sections of this chapter above, we can now briefly add the final element to this chapter's description of the basic conceptual structure of equality and diversity discourse: the distinction I have outlined between identity-based inequality and socio-economic inequality. It is this distinction that I believe is important in understanding the reason why class, despite its formal inclusion, seems to nonetheless be excluded – or, rather, depoliticised. I should perhaps repeat a disclaimer already made however: none of the analysis of this chapter is intended to, at this stage, link to broader empirical or theoretical debates. In this sense, to note this distinction in the meaning of equality in the discourse, and suggest its potential importance in explaining the move away from class, is not to say *why* it might be important. To begin to broach these broader questions about how the framework functions, I'll now turn to consider the latter as a historically dynamic entity: something that has been pushed and pulled in a variety of directions, by a number of different actors, in response to a changing social context.

Chapter Five: Diversity Management

The business take-up of the equality and diversity framework has undoubtedly been a major factor in its rise to prominence over the preceding decades. Not only is the workplace a key area of society in which equality and diversity policies operate, but in a world in which business has such an influential position it is hard to imagine any ideas, let alone equality and diversity, becoming mainstream without significant corporate support. The case study organisations I want to look at in this chapter reflect this: the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) and Schneider-Ross both put forward a business perspective in relation to equality and diversity in the context of differing organisational goals. A look at their respective discourses will therefore give us a useful insight into some of the ways in which the framework, described in the previous chapter, has been modified through its articulation with the business interests represented by these organisations. There are three points within this particular variant of equality and diversity discourse that I want to focus on: 1) the 'business case' for equality and diversity – i.e. the claim that equality and diversity can be thought of as beneficial to organisations for economic reasons, rather than as a legal necessity or ethical responsibility; 2) the shift in emphasis towards the 'diverse individual', away from group-based equality initiatives; 3) the focus on organisational culture as a key target of equality and diversity policies.

Once again, it's worth saying something about the two organisations themselves before I look more closely at the texts they've produced. The CBI was established in 1965 as a representative of Britain's employers. It is large and well-known, describing itself as the 'voice of British businesses' and the 'UK's top business lobbying organisation' (CBI, 2012). According to their figures they represent around 240,000 businesses that together employ a third of the private sector workforce (CBI, 2007a: 1). Its mission, according to its website, is to 'promote the conditions in which businesses of all sizes and sectors in the UK can compete and prosper for the benefit of all' (CBI, 2012). Equality and diversity, though not insignificant, is a fairly minor issue among the many areas their work covers. Illustrative of this is the relatively small number of texts (in

relation to their size) that the CBI has produced in comparison with my other case study organisations.⁷⁷

The majority of these texts are specific policy responses – that is, statements of the CBI position in relation to specific government reports or consultation documents. These aim to represent members' interests and opinions on specific topics, and are written by the CBI for government officials and other interested parties. The policy positions are generally supportive of equality and diversity, with a pragmatic line taken stressing cooperation between the different interests involved in the field. As is to be expected, they stress the need for policies that suit business interests, such as cutting down on costly bureaucratic 'burdens' and a focus on outcomes rather than processes; they are keen, in other words, to avoid a 'tick box' approach.⁷⁸ The most useful CBI (2008) text that I have found is a report called 'Talent not Tokenism: the business benefits of workforce diversity'. Produced in collaboration with the TUC and the EHRC, it is particularly useful in laying out the different arguments involved in the claim that equality and diversity is good for business, along with illustrative case studies of different businesses applying these arguments to policies on the ground.

The CBI texts I have chosen to look at date from the year 2000 onwards. While they have produced texts from before this time on the subject of equality and equal opportunities in the workplace, the other organisation I will look at in this chapter is more useful in relation to the earlier development of a specifically business-focused discourse. The organisation in question, Schneider-Ross, is a small but influential equality and diversity consultancy firm. They state that their mission is to 'provide the global expertise to our clients who want to become truly inclusive organisations, creating value from diversity'. They have worked with 'many of the world's leading companies to help them develop and implement their global diversity and inclusion strategies, including some big names such as Barclays, HSBC, Vodafone and BP (Schneider-Ross, 2012). Their work with these organisations involves carrying out audits on the current state of equality and diversity policies within that organisation, making

⁷⁷ I should also add that, compared with Schneider-Ross, the CBI texts contained less material of interest in relation to my overall argument. I have therefore focused more on the Schneider-Ross discourse in this chapter.

⁷⁸ See, for example, their response to a select committee inquiry on equality (CBI, 2007b).

recommendations, running training sessions for staff, and so on. The company was set up more recently than the CBI, in 1989, but a book written by Rachael Ross and Robin Schneider (the co-founders of the company) in 1992 was, according to them, the first business text on diversity in the UK: *From Equality to Diversity: A Business Case for Equal Opportunities* (Ross and Schneider, 1992). This is the main reason for the point made above on the insight that this case study gives us into the early development of 'diversity management'⁷⁹ – it will feature as a key text throughout this chapter.

Alongside this, Schneider-Ross have produced a number of reports and articles between 1998 and 2007 on various aspects of equality and diversity. There is an investigation of why women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities are under-represented in the senior civil service, for example (Schneider, 1999). There is also a report on the public duty to promote race equality written for the CRE (Commission for Racial Equality), together with a follow-up to this which looks at the impact of all three public sector duties, including those relating to gender and disability (Schneider-Ross, 2003, 2007a).⁸⁰ *The Business of Diversity* is also worth mentioning: published in 2002, it looks at the specific ways in which both public and private sector organisations are utilising equality and diversity for their particular organisational goals. It gives some useful insights into how diversity management techniques function in concrete settings, and the reasons behind the increasing use of these policies by the leaders of the organisations featured (Rutherford and Ollerearnshaw, 2002). It is this kind of in-depth look at the way in which equality and diversity interacts with organisational dynamics that gives the Schneider-Ross discourse its specificity in relation to the other institutions I am looking at.

⁷⁹ 'Managing diversity' or 'diversity management' is a label that according to Sonia Liff (1999: 67) was popularised in Britain by Kandola and Fullerton in their book first published in 1994: *Managing the Mosaic: Diversity in Action*. The term designated a new business-focused approach to the question of discrimination and inequality in the workplace – replacing that of 'equal opportunities'. I use the term in this thesis to describe the take-up of the equality and diversity framework, described in the previous chapter, by business or managerial interests with the different emphases and modifications to the framework that result. The three areas looked at in this chapter are all distinguishing characteristics of diversity management according to Kirton and Greene's (2005: 124-5) overview of this new approach.

⁸⁰ The race equality duty is the name commonly given to that part of the race relations amendment act of 2000 that gives public authorities a new statutory duty to promote race equality; the gender and disability duties, which were created in later legislation, do the same for these different grounds of inequality. There is more on this legislative device in the following chapter.

5.1 The Business Case

As I say, *From Equality to Diversity* was published in 1992. The preface outlines the basic aim of the book and the particular historical conjuncture to which it is a response:

In the two years that it took to write this book, there has been one particularly long-running debate between ourselves and the publishers: what should the title be? The reason for the difficulty was straightforward and leads us directly to the heart of this book: its topic to most people is known as 'Equal Opportunities' and yet, as far as we are concerned, that term is itself misleading and can cause needless hostility.

We argued that the time is right for a comprehensive re-evaluation of this whole field and that one of the concepts we have to stand on its head is that of Equal Opportunities itself. Its emphasis upon equality (ensuring parity of treatment between groups), and association with the legal process, is a recipe for confrontation, resistance to change and lack of progress.

In our view there is a simple solution to this impasse. It is time for employers to claim this subject as their own. They should not be looking to change because they are being forced into it by the law, the Government, Local Authorities or campaigning groups. They should choose to embrace change in order to realise particular business benefits; the stimulus for change must be internal not external. The aim of this book, therefore, is to make the business case for change and to give employers a framework for achieving change (Ross and Schneider, 1992: ix).

According to John Solomos (1989: 12-3), the second half of the 1980s was a period when the multicultural initiatives of the earlier part of the decade began to run into difficulties.⁸¹ Solomos also notes the conflict felt at the time between the prevailing market ideology of the period and the 'pursuit of equity' through 'judicial channels'. Writing in 1989, he observes that the 'concern with promoting a greater role for the market fits uneasily with the pursuit of equity for racial

⁸¹ More specifically, Solomos (1989: 12) mentions 'negative media publicity' including its focus on the 'loony left', 'resistance to change by the local white population', and the 'attack' on anti-racism by 'sections of the political right'. Hewitt (2005: 32-3) adds to this 'serious own-goals' by those pursuing anti-racist policies at the time such as the 'clumsy style of anti-racist policy implementation adopted by a number of left-dominated boroughs', and the divorce of anti-racism from a 'wider set of political concerns' – especially that of class.

minorities through administrative and judicial channels'. This is clearly registered in the passage above where Ross and Schneider note the 'impasse' the pursuit of equal opportunities has led to and the problematic 'emphasis upon equality' implied by the term itself.

The timing of the book (*From Equality to Diversity*) is significant, then, as it arises at a perceived moment of failure in the advance of the equality and diversity framework. The solution to this deadlock is, as Ross and Schneider suggest, 'simple': employers should present their own case for pursuing equal opportunities rather than having it imposed upon them via political and legal means. Ten years later *The Business of Diversity* makes clear how influential this solution became: the report notes the emergence, during the 1990s, of 'strongly business-focused campaigns', giving examples of trend-setting organisations such as Business in the Community (who initiated Opportunity Now and Race for Opportunity⁸²) and the two Employers' Forums on disability and age discrimination (Rutherford and Ollerearnshaw, 2002: 3).

Of course, what is highlighted here is a trend rather than a more precise event or set of events. The Opportunity Now campaign, established in 1991, continued a process that actually began during the previous decade:

There was a shift in the Eighties away from the legalism of the equality legislation towards a recognition that it made business sense to look after women employees. So initially, it was the need to retain women, once recruited, that provided the kernel to the business case. It was recognised that costs of losing trained women and then having to replace them, could be hurting the bottom line. It was clear that in order to appeal to the business community, equal opportunities had to be linked to the bottom line (ibid: 8).

It is also clear from the same report that it was towards the end of the 90s that deeper organisational shifts started to occur across both the public and private sector. In a survey of 140 organisations the largest percentage of respondents (33%) established equality and diversity as a business priority within the last three to five years (i.e. from 1997), and another 15% within the previous two

⁸² Two campaigns for improving the position of disadvantaged groups in business – women and ethnic minorities respectively.

years (i.e. from 2000) (ibid: 18). As we will see, this period (the later part of the 90s) is clearly a significant time of expansion of equality and diversity.

It is worth giving one of the more interesting examples of this process of business 'ownership' of equal opportunities: while Ford (the car company)

had various equal opportunity policies in place, including some excellent monitoring systems, for many years, there was no comprehensive policy tied in to the business case until eighteen months ago. Since 1995 there had been a big push for diversity in the US led by CEO Jacques Nasser. In the UK, however, Ford was facing a turbulent time as trade unions charged their management with racism. Incidents had occurred which workers felt were not being addressed properly culminating in a series of wildcat strikes, a legal action by Asian worker Sukhjit Parmar and the threat of further strikes. This crisis led Nasser to fly into Britain, amidst huge publicity, in October 1999 to answer criticisms of institutionalised racism in Ford of Britain. A formal investigation by the CRE (Commission for Racial Equality) hung over Ford and it was agreed that it would be postponed if certain action was taken. Surinder Sharma was headhunted from Littlewoods to mastermind the strategy. He says *'although we started from this external pressure, we have a very positive approach and want to make sure that we really are the best in the business'*.

In only eighteen months Ford has already begun implementation of a really comprehensive diversity strategy across Europe, and is a good example of how much can be achieved in a short period of time, even in the wake of difficult circumstances. It has begun to integrate diversity with a strong business focus into every aspect of the organisation (ibid: 19).

Here we see a good example of a more general dynamic that I am highlighting: the 'external pressure' faced by a business, as a result of the conflicts generated by inequality that threaten the smooth running of operations, leads to an attempt to 'integrate diversity with a strong business focus into every aspect of the organisation'.

So what are the actual arguments involved in this idea that equality and diversity can be good for business and not merely a matter of legal compliance? In the literature we can pick out three central claims: 1) diversity policies improve the workplace; 2) diversity policies widen the recruitment net to attract the best talent available; 3) a diverse workforce helps mirror an increasingly

diverse customer base.⁸³ As I've said above, the CBI text, 'Talent not Tokenism', gives a detailed account of the way businesses can benefit in all three areas.

For example, in the introduction to this report it is argued that '[i]ncreasing employee satisfaction, which helps attract new staff and retain those already there, reduces recruitment costs, and can increase productivity' (CBI, 2008: 7). Further on, a similar argument is made: '[t]reating people fairly in recruitment, training and development, and promotion has helped these businesses [featured in the report] build a reputation for being good places to work' with similar resulting benefits (ibid: 10). This is pretty straightforward: avoiding conflicts and staff resentment will ultimately pay-off in the ways mentioned. However, this seems to be about equality and fairness in how people are treated, rather than diversity in the more specific sense of how different types of people can, as a result of their differences, improve the business.

Something similar might be said of the recruitment argument. For example, if we return briefly to the Schneider-Ross discourse, we see that the 'war for talent' is prominent: this is 'an argument that began in the late Eighties based on demographics, which showed that there would be proportionally fewer young job seekers, including graduates, over the next twenty-five years and that therefore employers needed to recruit from a wider pool than they had been doing' (Rutherford and Ollerearnshaw, 2002: 8). This 'war for talent' takes place at the same time as the UK population is ageing, and where women, ethnic minorities and disabled people are increasing in terms of numbers of job-seekers – what the authors describe as 'changing labour market demographics' (ibid: 3).⁸⁴ Similarly, the CBI (2005: 1) state at the beginning of their evidence to the Labour government's Equalities Review (this review will be discussed in the following chapter): 'CBI members know that in an increasingly tight labour market, widening the pool of skills available beyond traditional sources is of

⁸³ See Squires (2005: 9) for a similar account of the different arguments involved in the business case.

⁸⁴ This argument concerning demographics was particularly influential in the United States where a report published in 1987 entitled 'Workforce 2000', by the Hudson Institute, sought to show how, by the year 2000, white men would be a minority of new entrants to the workforce. The influence of this report is seen by a number of authors as helping to initiate the new diversity management approach – see, for example, Kirton and Greene, citing Kandola and Fullerton (2005: 123-4) and Wood (2003: 204-210).

growing importance to business success'. However, as with workplace improvement, the argument here seeks to simply avoid discrimination against a particular section of the population in order to broaden the potential workforce. In other words, only drawing from one particular demographic will inevitably mean missing out on skills and potential held by people in other social groups.

In contrast, diversity is also said to be of benefit through the specific contribution human differences can make to the business. For example, in a case study of Serco (an international service company), it is explained that the company is 'clear that promoting diversity in its approach to customers and in its workforce isn't just about winning contracts [from public bodies]':

Delivering a broad range of services around the world means we must be an innovative and diverse business. Employees that have broader experiences and thinking styles help us improve the services we deliver and develop new types of business that benefits our customers, their customers and of course our people (CBI quoting Christopher Hyman, Chief Executive of Serco, 2008: 34-5).

In other words, diversity policies do not simply extend the chances of finding people who are good thinkers according to some universal standard (through looking for talent amongst minority groups that aren't being properly considered during the recruitment process). Rather, these policies help find different 'thinking styles' that will then benefit the company.

This idea that differences can contribute something to businesses is often central to the marketing and customer-service argument: diverse workforces help to mirror or reflect a diverse customer base. For example, one of the 'tangible benefits' of diversity includes '[u]nderstanding better how the company's diverse customers think and what drives their spending habits' (ibid: 7). On the following page, similar issues are raised for managers and executives reading the report:

Perhaps your customer base is limited to people who all look like one another and like your staff – this could mean there are untapped markets for your business that a more diverse workforce could help you reach. Or maybe your customers look

very different from your staff and you're worried you don't know enough about how they think (ibid: 8).

Here the second sentence appears to establish a direct link between how customers look in terms of physical characteristics and how they think. It is easy to see on the basis of passages like this how the criticism has emerged of diversity management – echoing criticisms of multiculturalism more broadly – that it leads to an 'unnaturally reified view of ethnicity and exaggerates the importance of cultural differences...perpetuating a view of the permanence and immutability of cultures, while reducing ethnicity to simplified constructs that can be easily summarised in management training sessions' (Wrench, 2005: 77). The question raised here is whether it is possible for an organisation to balance a concern for the individual with a recognition of group-based characteristics, or whether this, in reality, constitutes an impossible balancing act. I will look at the way in which this issue is dealt with by the discourse in the following section.

A final aspect of the business case that is worth mentioning relates to the global context in which business operates. As I mentioned in my introduction to this chapter, Schneider-Ross has a specific international focus and this is apparent in their discourse – in particular, the links drawn between global economic processes and diversity. In one article, for example, it is claimed that:

Spurred on by the advance of technology and the spread of markets far beyond national or traditional boundaries, globalisation is both the new reality and the backdrop against which diversity is developing apace.

Businesses with any serious ambitions towards the world stage must now wrestle with the conundrum of how best they might sensitise their product or service to local markets that may differ widely from one another. To do so, they require people who can speak the local language and who are tuned in to the local culture (Schneider, 2001b: 27).

The article goes on to link this increasing global focus of companies with the similarly increasing power of the 'diverse' individual consumer to influence production:

The impact of globalisation is all the greater for the way that customer need is increasingly driving many markets. Companies and governments are starting to acknowledge that consumers and peoples around the world are not a homogeneous mass. Indeed, we at Schneider-Ross are invited more and more frequently by clients in the UK to help them to segment their complex domestic markets, let alone global ones, and to improve their understanding of the differing needs of women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities who might use their products and services (ibid).

In another article of that year it is argued that all this constitutes a significant economic shift: 'through the new delivery mechanisms such as the internet, we are inexorably moving into an era of "mass customisation" – where individuals can expect and demand services that are very precisely tailored to their unique individual needs and preferences' (Schneider, 2001a: 3).

A further interesting aspect of the global dimension to the business case is the contrast that exists between, on the one hand, the increasing awareness of, and response to, cultural differences around the world on the part of global companies, and, on the other, the attempt to establish a single cohesive culture within those same organisations. This interaction between the global and the local, between the universal processes driving the expansion of multinational companies around the world and the particular cultures encountered, is perhaps best illustrated in a report on equality and diversity for businesses working in the Asia-Pacific region (i.e. India and China). Under the heading 'Aligning Global Approaches With Local Culture And Norms' the report observes that some multinationals are 'struggling to make global talent management practices work effectively in cultures and economies very different from other geographies where they operate'. It is then argued that '[g]reater local flexibility is needed to develop employment packages that respond to market conditions. At the same time, core processes such as performance management are being tested for cultural biases that unfairly hold back the progression of local talent' (Schneider-Ross, 2007b: 20). In other words, in order to 'align' the global and the local there needs to be both 'flexibility', in response to diverse local conditions, as well as the maintenance of the neutrality (i.e. universality) of 'core processes'.

This idea of constructing an 'inclusive culture' that can incorporate diversity will be further explored in the final section of this chapter. For now I will simply highlight the fact that these links between globalisation and the business case bring to mind the claims of critics, such as Slavoj Žižek (1997), that there is an important connection between the development of global capitalism and the rise of multiculturalism. Indeed the arguments for a business case more generally are embedded in a wider neoliberal discourse of an expanding global economy, increasingly knowledge-based and service-led economies (for Western nations such as Britain at least), the increasing sovereignty of the market more generally, and in particular a stress on the individual as the key to a dynamic, modern economy. This last aspect is particularly interesting and leads us to the next section.⁸⁵

5.2 From Equal Groups to Diverse Individuals

The influence of the United States is probably felt more in the diversity management variant of equality and diversity than anywhere else. The idea of diversity (in its specific multicultural combination with equality) also has a very precise origin in this country: in 1978 a court case, *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke*, gave rise to the first official appeal to diversity as a way of defending affirmative action. A white student, Allan Bakke, challenged the legality of a 'Special Admissions' program run by the University of California on the basis that this program unfairly admitted less qualified minority candidates ahead of him, thereby denying him a place. The case went all the way to the Supreme Court and was ultimately decided in Bakke's favour; however in his

⁸⁵ Another aspect of the business case that should be mentioned is, interestingly, a return to the ethical and social justice dimension of equality and diversity policies, but this time as an internal motive of the organisation, rather than an externally imposed challenge to the organisation from equality movements. This is a point made a number of times in the Schneider-Ross discourse – for example: '[w]e have indicated a number of tangible business benefits that organisations are realising as a result of their work on diversity. At the same time, however, there is something of a move towards a more "in principle" support – without having to prove the return on investment in purely commercial terms'. While this has always been a 'key driver for the public sector, social justice now features as a main driver for the private sector too. It could be argued that the rationale for the promotion of equality and diversity in organisations has come full circle, as many private sector leaders now actively espouse the moral imperative of doing so' (Rutherford and Ollerearnshaw, 2002: 14-5). There is a move, then (visible in other 'corporate responsibility' initiatives such as fair trade and community involvement schemes), towards a kind of enlightened self-interest on the part of companies in which an enhanced 'ethical' reputation will ultimately benefit the organisation.

ruling Justice Powell, one of the members of the court, famously introduced the idea of diversity as a way of defending the university program, arguing that diversity was a legitimate public good that may in certain circumstances outweigh the principle of non-discrimination. As Peter Wood (2003: 99) observes, this ruling was to be hugely influential.⁸⁶

What was the aim behind this famous ruling? Wood describes Justice Powell's decision as an attempt at a 'painless solution to the nation's racial divisions' that only made things worse (ibid: 145). Walter Benn Michaels (2006: 4), another American critic of diversity, though this time from the left, describes the decision as a 'kind of end run around the historical problem of racism'. In other words, the aim was to turn the pursuit of racial equality into the promotion of diversity no different, in principle, to the promotion of other less contentious types of difference – for example, geographical differences (i.e. the different areas of the country that students are from) have been considered to be of importance in ensuring a diverse student body, as both Wood and Michaels note. The hope was to avoid a more controversial confrontation with the history of racism in America. However, as Michaels points out, while diversity may have been initially introduced as a way of avoiding the question of inequality, 'the commitment to diversity became deeply associated with the struggle against racism. Indeed, the goal of overcoming racism, which had sometimes been identified as the goal of creating a "color-blind" society, was now reconceived as the goal of creating a diverse, that is, a color-conscious, society' (ibid: 4-5).

The specifically *corporate* take-up of diversity in the United States did not develop until a number of years after the Bakke case. The short piece often cited as a key early statement of a proposed new approach to the issue of equal opportunities is called 'From Affirmative Action to Affirming Diversity'; it was written in 1990 by an American management guru, R. Roosevelt Thomas. As the title of the article makes clear, diversity, as with the Powell verdict, marks an attempt to move away from the idea of affirmative action. The key problem for Thomas (and a point made in the previous chapter) is the *temporary* nature of affirmative action and similar policies aiming to correct social inequalities; what

⁸⁶ See Wood (2003: chapter five) for a detailed analysis of the Bakke case and its legacy in the United States.

is needed, therefore, is a more permanent solution. This point is made clear by Thomas (1990: 108), when, having extolled the virtues of affirmative action policies, he argues that nonetheless:

affirmative action is an artificial, transitional intervention intended to give managers a chance to correct an imbalance, an injustice, a mistake. Once the numbers mistake has been corrected, I don't think affirmative action alone can cope with the remaining long term task of creating a work setting geared to the upward mobility of all kinds of people, including white males. It is difficult for affirmative action to influence upward mobility even in the short run, primarily because it is perceived to conflict with the meritocracy we favor. For this reason, affirmative action is a red flag to every individual who feels unfairly passed over and a stigma for those who appear to be its beneficiaries.

As is clear from this passage the key conflict, or, at least, 'perceived' conflict,⁸⁷ is that between the necessary action required to create 'upward mobility' for disadvantaged groups (affirmative action) and the 'meritocracy we favor'; because of the temporary nature of the former, this conflict cannot be solved. In other words, affirmative action temporarily suspends meritocracy in order to correct a historic injustice and therefore cannot be reconciled with it. As Thomas argues:

what affirmative action means in practice is an unnatural focus on one group, and what it means too often to too many employees is that someone is playing fast and loose with standards in order to favor that group. Unless we are to compromise our standards, a thing no competitive company can even contemplate, upward mobility for minorities and women should always be a question of pure competence and character unmuddled by accidents of birth.

And that is precisely why we have to learn to manage diversity – to move beyond affirmative action, not to repudiate it (ibid: 108).

⁸⁷ That the term 'perceived' is used is significant, I think, in that it shows that Thomas doesn't think that affirmative action actually is unfair in any way, only that people think that it is. This adds weight, then, to the interpretation of the rise of diversity as a pragmatic response to problems encountered with how equality policies are presented to the public, and not a rejection of these policies or the principles behind them.

Diversity arises, then, as an attempt to solve this conflict between equality policies and meritocracy by combining the differential treatment necessary for affirmative action with a return to meritocratic principles.

To take a closer look at this solution, we can turn to the Schneider-Ross discourse and *From Equality to Diversity*, published two years after the article by Thomas just cited. In comparison with Thomas, 'affirmative action' is not generally named as the problem – this is to be expected as affirmative action has never been legal in Britain and, it's probably fair to say, the weaker 'positive action' measures that have been allowed have not been quite such a source of acrimony and national debate as in the United States. Nonetheless, equal opportunities is clearly registered as a source of conflict within the text and therefore something requiring a solution:

Equal opportunities has, in the main, been seen as something which has been imposed on employers. For some, it has been about doing something for 'them' at the expense of 'us'.

The law enshrined the moral case for equal opportunity. Employers had a responsibility to help create a fair and equal society. If they failed to do so, then they could end up in court. Somehow or other, there seemed to be a whiff of confrontation about it all (Ross and Schneider, 1992: 49-50).

Furthermore:

One of the consequences of the emphasis placed on external influences [i.e. the political/legal challenge to business just mentioned] was that organisational change in this area simply mirrored the structure of the legislative changes. The law defined discrimination by defining its causes – for instance, prejudice against women or minorities – and so did employers. The law established two 'single issue' Commissions [on race and gender] and so employers looked at discrimination against these groups. Discrimination was not something to tackle 'holistically' in the round, it was about achieving parity between groups. The very term '*equal opportunities*' seemed to lend its weight to this interpretation.

The danger associated with tackling the issue piecemeal, one group at a time, is that one group, often women, receives a great deal of attention and little thought is given, for instance, to people with disabilities, ethnic minorities or older people.

Moreover, equal opportunities seems to be no longer about fundamental principles (such as appointing the best person for the job) but is instead seen as 'special pleading' for minority groups (ibid: 51).

In the second paragraph of the second quote we see, as with Thomas, a clash between the 'fundamental principles', in which job appointments are made on the basis of merit, and equality policies that seek to establish favourable treatment of minorities. The same thing that the CBI report (2008) is keen to avoid, tokenism, 'follows directly from this approach. Recruiting and developing members of a minority group becomes an end in itself' (1992: 51).

One part of the solution – again, just as Thomas argues against an 'unnatural focus on one group' – is to shift attention towards the individual:

In reality, what is important is focusing on the individual rather than the group. From a selection point of view, the important thing about a female recruit is not that she is a woman, but whether she has the skills to do the job. Putting people into 'boxes', seeing them as representatives of a particular group rather than as one particular individual, is profoundly counter-productive (ibid: 52).

What is needed instead is for

objective selection systems to be in place and applied. This will be to the benefit of everyone in the organisation: it is as much to the advantage of the white male that selection decisions are made on the basis of skill [i.e. merit], as it is to any member of any so-called minority group...In essence, if organisations can ensure that they are able to treat individuals fairly and they are able to respond flexibly to individual needs, then they do not need to worry about groups. Equal opportunities should look after itself (ibid: 52).

In other words, what is needed is a focus on individual merit as the sole criterion for organisations to recruit and promote – avoiding the conflicts and difficulties associated with the attempt to bypass that principle in order to correct group inequalities.

This is not a surprising finding within the discourse. As Squires (2005: 13) puts it, citing Iris Marion Young: it is a 'widely held principle of justice that positions

and rewards should be distributed according to individual merit, measured as the greatest skill for performing the tasks that positions require'. It also undoubtedly chimes with the neoliberal right in a way that an appeal to stronger versions of equality of opportunity do not; it is therefore a key strategic move in the attempt to gain the adherence of business leaders to the equality and diversity framework. As John Wrench (2005: 82) has noted, this shift in emphasis has been welcomed by many employers as it 'fits well with the trend to economic liberalism and the move in industrial relations away from trade unions and collective bargaining'.⁸⁸

However, as Wrench also points out, this, to use his phrase, "individualising tendency" of diversity management threatens to alienate those supporters of a more traditional, politicised approach to equality. For example, the TUC – an organisation with a long history of collective struggles – strongly criticised diversity management through a motion discussed and subsequently carried at the TUC Black Workers' conference of 1997:

Conference notes with concern the increasing trend amongst personnel and human resource management practitioners to seek to replace existing equal opportunities policies and procedures with those titled managing diversity or mainstreaming.

Both of these stress the perspective of the individual within the employing organisation, rather than focusing on the promotion of equal opportunities strategies, or on challenging discriminatory practices and outcomes (TUC, 1997: 3).

The conference goes on to call on the TUC Race Relations Committee to 'support initiatives that expose the inadequacies of "managing diversity" and "mainstreaming"', and 'work with all unions and other organisations who are actively encouraging effective policies and proposals to improve racial equality' (ibid).⁸⁹ Other voices in the equality and diversity field, such as former chair of

⁸⁸ See also Doug Miller (1996: 205) and Squires (2005: 12). The latter writes that the diversity management approach 'melds more readily with the norms of individualism and meritocracy that characterise neo-liberal polities'. She also adds that in the US where 'hard' affirmative action measures have been rendered both 'unpopular and illegal', diversity programmes have been developed 'which do not rely on numerical targets and quotas'. Interestingly, as we will see below, the Schneider-Ross discourse tries to maintain a distinction between the concept of 'targets', on the one hand, and 'quotas' on the other.

⁸⁹ Although it should also be remembered that the TUC are the co-producers of *Talent not Tokenism*, which clearly sets out a diversity management approach (CBI, 2008). As we will see in chapter

the CRE, Herman Ouseley, have also voiced concerns along similar lines: '[d]iversity approaches that encourage managers to ignore the realities of inequality and discrimination, which create such conditions for people from particular groups, will mean that the status quo is maintained' (quoted in Liff, 1997: 11). There is a strong strand of opinion, then, within the equality and diversity field that sees diversity management as little more than a 'soft option' (Wrench, 2005: 75-6).⁹⁰

However, despite these concerns, it should be stressed that the solution to the conflict between group-based equality policies and the principle of individual merit is not a straight-forward promotion of the latter and rejection of the former. It is better understood, I think, as a reconstitution of group-belonging as a feature of individuality. This enables the continuation of group-based equality policies through presenting them as a way of fulfilling individual potential rather than making groups equal. This is where, then, we see 'diversity' enter the argument:

When the focus is on individuals rather than groups, then there is a corresponding shift away from equality towards diversity.

Every individual is, by definition, unique. The organisations that will succeed in the future are those that can harness this human diversity to advantage. The focus is not on equalising the differences between groups, but on responding to individual needs and aspirations.

Once again, we find the term 'equal opportunities' unhelpful. 'Equal' seems to suggest that everyone should receive exactly the same treatment. This can be interpreted as meaning: 'they' have to fit in with the way 'we' do things. In other

seven, the TUC, due to its nature as an organisation, tends to have a wider range of perspectives on equality issues than the other organisations I am looking at. *Talent not Tokenism* is also published 11 years later than the conference motion I have cited, which helps demonstrate the success diversity management has had in gaining widespread support across the equality and diversity field over the years.

⁹⁰ Interestingly, this danger is also alluded to in the Schneider-Ross discourse itself. In a report co-produced with Runnymede it is observed that '[t]here are... indications that some companies may be using the diversity agenda (everyone is different, we are each unique) not as a way of setting an overall, and inclusive, context for change but as a way of avoiding getting into "single issues" such as race' (Sanglin-Grant and Schneider, 2000: 24). This criticism is also made in a number of academic studies. For example, Miller has argued that diversity management's 'remoulding of equal rights to capture and contain it within a market model has all but expunged the political meaning of positive action' (quoted in Wrench, 2005: 78).

words, women and minorities are free to join us, we will make all decisions based on merit, but we insist on them conforming to our 'norms' (Ross and Schneider, 1992: 52).

Here, we see both elements of the conflict brought together: 'all decisions based on merit' as a principle is combined with an idea of difference that can ground group-based initiatives.

This solution, while clearly influential, is nonetheless not without its problems. We find in the diversity management discourse the same tricky balancing act we found in the previous chapter between the individual and their group belonging: the diverse individual brings social group characteristics to the organisation that the organisation should try to harness to stay competitive; however, by contributing a group characteristic there is always the danger that the individual will become reduced to nothing more than a 'carrier' of that characteristic – will be stereotyped, in other words, as representing that group rather than simply being themselves. We saw in the previous chapter how the Fawcett discourse clearly recognised this danger in relation to the diversity-based argument that more women at the top of capitalist institutions would help to avoid problems with the banking system. The answer lay in the idea of women's 'different life experiences', as opposed to the reliance on a stereotypical view of women as naturally averse to the kind of risk-taking behaviour practiced by male bankers. We see a similar recognition of the issue in the CBI discourse. For example, the introduction to 'Talent not Tokenism' states that

Everyone brings to the workplace the different characteristics that make them who they are. Each person has a different experience and viewpoint. *While it's important not to stereotype by assuming that all people who share a characteristic will think or behave in the same way*, many companies now understand how they benefit from having in their workforce people with a range of characteristics, viewpoints and experiences who feel valued for all of these (CBI, 2008: 10 – my emphasis).

Here the danger to avoid is explicitly stated. Is it possible, though, to avoid stereotyping while nonetheless including people on the basis of the fact that

they contribute a difference of some kind? This is a central question with which equality and diversity discourse has to grapple.

A further tension surrounds the key concept of merit. As I say, there is a continued importance attached to group-based measures within both the CBI and Schneider-Ross discourses, alongside the focus on individual merit – these measures are generally grouped under the term 'positive action'. It is important, however, for both organisations to distinguish positive action from positive discrimination or affirmative action – the latter being differentiated on the basis that it ignores merit. In other words (again, in theory at least), positive action refers to actions taken to help individuals from disadvantaged or under-represented groups compete on equal terms with others. This may involve simply directing the advertising of jobs towards these groups and encouraging their members to apply for those jobs, or it may take the form of more substantial help, such as special training opportunities, support networks, mentoring, or changing existing working practices to enable people with different circumstances to compete on equal terms.⁹¹ As it is put in *Talent not Tokenism*, '[t]hese “balancing measures” reflect the possibility that in some cases, to achieve a fair outcome, a difference in approach and methods to encourage may be required' (CBI, 2008: 6). In contrast, positive discrimination is understood as taking into account a group characteristic at the point of decision (to hire, promote etc), thereby choosing between candidates on the basis of a principle other than merit. As it is made clear, this is not merely a pragmatic distinction but one grounded in British and European discrimination law (ibid).

While this is clearly an important distinction that is drawn and relied upon in order to reconcile group-based measures with a focus on merit – in practice what comes through in the texts is the difficulty of upholding this distinction. In a response to the select committee inquiry on equality – more specifically, on the proposal by the committee to extend positive action measures – the CBI (2007b) states that, while 'there may be benefits to extending the scope of positive action within the limits of EU law',

⁹¹ For example, allowing flexible working for jobs, or job sharing, may enable more women to apply for positions.

CBI members have said before that the line between positive action, which is lawful, and positive discrimination, which is not, is a very fine one. Employers who might want to take positive action to increase the diversity of their workforce are often confused about how to go about doing this without falling foul of the law.

This 'fine' line is also very apparent in the Schneider-Ross discourse. Here it often takes the form of a corresponding distinction between targets (positive action) and quotas (affirmative action or positive discrimination).

Again, according to Ross and Schneider (1992: 16), the distinction between the two has its basis in UK law with targets being legal, unlike quotas. As they explain, a target is an 'aspiration, it represents a realistic appraisal of what is possible in the future. A quota, on the other hand, reserves a certain number of jobs regardless of the merit of the applicants. The distinction might be fine but it, and the principle of merit upon which it relies, is very important'. On the following page they similarly declare that: as the following chapters of the book will show, 'this is a particular tightrope that organisations have to walk. In our view, too exclusive a focus on equality targets can become a problem. These targets should be a measure of progress, not an end in themselves' (ibid: 17).⁹²

Despite the reluctance of companies surveyed on this question, *The Business of Diversity* argues that when it comes down to it 'it is hard to implement diversity and equality policy without some kind of goals or targets in mind and many of our respondents do set goals' (Rutherford and Ollerearnshaw, 2002: 29). In contrast, the results of a survey taken two years earlier show that while 'many of the respondent companies monitor the ethnicity of their employees, most do not go on to set targets for the representation of ethnic minority employees' – only 10% according to the results (Sanglin-Grant and Schneider,

⁹² Again, Miller (1996: 204) points to the same issue: he writes that amongst employers 'target setting is still viewed as too "radical" in the sense that there is a risk of confusion between targets and "quotas"'. It is also worth noting that the public sector are 'more comfortable with the whole concept of targets and goals' (Rutherford and Ollerearnshaw, 2002: 29). This no doubt reflects the fact that, despite market-based reforms, the public sector still has a tradition and ethos of pursuing social goals, such as equality, and therefore more of a willingness to set aside the merit principle in order to achieve these aims.

2000: 15).⁹³ The report records that '[i]nterestingly, this question provoked many of the strongest comments in the company responses', quoting one as declaring that their company:

consciously avoids operating a quota system ['targets' and 'quotas' are here conflated by the respondent] in regard to ethnic minorities, because it is our belief that individuals should be allowed to progress on the basis of merit, irrespective of race, gender, sex, religion, age or physical disability. To introduce quotas could potentially create a positive discrimination mindset with the danger of arousing prejudice where none currently exists (ibid).

The authors of the report then add this comment: '[t]argets (or “aspirations” as they are sometimes called) are not only consistent with a merit-based approach but also necessary for it. They are a way of challenging the otherwise natural tendency for organisations to “clone” by choosing the “comfortable” candidate' (ibid). In other words, left to their own devices organisations will naturally tend to bypass merit and instead simply recruit according to familiarity. The solution then – precisely because this is a 'natural' tendency of organisations and not an artificial failure – is not to temporarily suspend the importance of merit through the use of affirmative action-style quotas, but rather try to more permanently redefine merit on the basis of a constant vigilance against these tendencies.

I want to finish this part of the chapter with one more example on this point. A section by Ross and Schneider (1992: 16-7) on 'Setting equality targets' begins by emphasising the need for targets to be 'realistic', and the corresponding importance, therefore, of being able to accurately monitor the make-up of the current workforce (and also – although they don't mention this here – the labour-pool from which that business draws). Presumably an unrealistic target will begin to put pressure on the merit principle at the point of selection, whereas a realistic target merely works against the natural tendency for organisations to be non-meritocratic. The authors then go on to discuss the situation of two equal candidates and if positive discrimination is then

⁹³ The reason for the difference in the results is not the main issue here – the aim is rather to show the tensions that emerge around this question. However, it is worth considering whether the difference in the results may have something to do with the fact that the second report, in which a minority of respondents set targets or goals, is, unlike the first, focused purely on the question of racial equality and not the other types of equality (such as gender or disability) – race being undoubtedly a more controversial area in which to undertake this kind of action.

acceptable. They mention a 'slight shift' on this issue by the CRE, who in their 1985 review of the Race Relations Act proposed that in a situation of equal merit between candidates, the one from the 'under-represented group should be appointed'. Ross and Schneider comment that this policy is 'always somewhat problematic: are there ever really equal candidates? It makes a target much more like a quota. Moreover, by advocating the use of ethnic origin as the determining factor this again undermines one of the basic principles of the Act'. In other words, the group identity (here, ethnicity), despite only being applicable in a situation of hypothetical equality between candidates, would start to infringe on the individual and the 'merit principle'.

Interestingly, the CRE, in the later withdrawal of their proposal in 1991, are cited as making a similar point, and here the issue links with the question of (and potential dangers that may arise from) monitoring: according to the CRE the proposal 'does have the drawback that it would stop the use of ethnic monitoring data being neutral in its impact on individuals' (CRE quoted in *ibid*: 17). In other words, the monitoring of ethnic identity would cease to be simply a way of setting 'realistic targets', and would therefore stop being consistent with the merit principle (if we accept the redefinition of merit that involves a critique of the 'natural' tendencies of organisations that I've described above). The monitoring would instead encroach upon the individual by linking their declaration of group identity on the monitoring form to their treatment, as an individual, within the organisation.

In a further development in relation to this issue, the most recent Equality Act (2010) made the use of positive discrimination in this situation (where the candidates are of equal merit) legal (the so-called 'tie-breaker' clause). It is also worth noting that the potential 'drawback' mentioned by the CRE is, for a critic of multiculturalism such as Kenan Malik (2007), a danger inherent to the practice of ethnic monitoring as such, not merely in relation to this hypothetical situation. He argues in one article that the

problem with ethnic classification is not just that the data may not be useful. It is that the process of classification often creates the very problems it is supposed to solve. Identities are not natural categories. They are created through social

interaction. But as multicultural categories receive official sanction, so they become in a certain sense fixed and appear almost natural. Once the distribution of political power, financial resources and social opportunities become linked to one's membership of a particular group, so these group identities acquire a reality denied to other identities.

In other words, for Malik, any attempt to monitor the ethnicity of individuals will ensure that the individual becomes bound to a fixed and naturalised group identity. It is interesting, then, to see the same danger recognised, and the issue wrestled with, within equality and diversity discourse itself.

5.3 Cultural Change and Integration

The theme of organisational cultures, and how to change them, is an important issue in the diversity management discourse. This is no surprise as clearly the issue is going to be of interest to representatives of business owners and to management consultants whose livelihoods depend, in different ways, on the smooth running of organisations. The theme is particularly strong in the Schneider-Ross discourse: as equality and diversity consultants, there is an emphasis on the strategies for change that will help organisations to successfully incorporate equality and diversity policies. *From Equality to Diversity*, for example, argues that a focus on diversity is not just about changing procedures and objective systems; rather, a more 'organic' transformation is required:

We should not deny that individuals are different and therefore have different strengths and different needs. In itself, therefore, simply ensuring that there are objective decision-making processes in place is insufficient. If an organisation is really concerned with diversity rather than just equality, then it needs to look at its total culture – not just its systems...Unless the overall culture is responsive to different needs, then progress will be very limited. Recruits might be selected from non-traditional sources, but they will not stay if they do not feel they can succeed (Ross and Schneider, 1992: 53).

On the following page the authors conclude with a similar sentiment: '[i]f an organisation is committed to equal opportunities, then it is not enough to review the current systems and check that they are "fair". It means taking a hard look at the organisation and ensuring that it supports cultural diversity rather than a mono-culture' (ibid: 54).

This aspect of the discourse can also be understood in relation to the shift I've already noted from more temporary, group-based equality measures (such as affirmative action in the United States) to the more permanent idea of promoting or 'managing' diversity. In other words, once we are no longer talking about an 'artificial, transitional intervention' correcting an 'imbalance, an injustice, a mistake', but rather the 'long term task of creating a work setting geared to the upward mobility of all kinds of people' (Thomas, 1990: 108), the issue of how to embed the equality and diversity framework within an organisation becomes crucial. This, in turn, leads us to a concern with a positive change in how the organisation operates as a whole, not merely with correcting a temporary moment of failure (i.e. discrimination). One Schneider-Ross article argues that the diversity approach 'acknowledges that representation is part of the issue' but 'places a cultural transformation at its heart. It is about creating a working culture that looks for, respects, values and therefore harnesses difference'. Change is 'not about helping "them" join "us", but about critically looking at "us" and rooting out all the aspects of our culture that inappropriately exclude and stop us from being inclusive – whether in the way we relate to employees, potential employees, customers, business partners or other stakeholders' (Schneider, 2001b: 26). Nine years earlier Ross and Schneider (1992: 55) predicted that '[i]n time' equal opportunities will 'not be a topic of controversy and debate. It will not be viewed as something in favour of minorities and against whites. It will however, be normal to be different and equal opportunities principles will be integrated into the values of organisations'. It is worth noting here that where a few pages earlier Ross and Schneider had found the term 'equal opportunities' 'unhelpful', here the term is used to refer simply to that which is 'integrated' into an organisation. Diversity (it being 'normal to be different') is presented as simply the 'integration' of the old equal opportunity policies into existing institutions.

What exactly is implied by the term 'integration'? *The Business of Diversity* has a chapter dedicated to the concept, although in

one sense the whole of this report is about integration. What we mean by integration is the incorporation of the values of equality and diversity into the heart of an organisation, so that it has become part of its culture. It is much more than a few add-on policies "owned" by HR. For instance, BT refers to integration as being a process in which diversity and equality are included at every stage of the business – in BT Values, BT style, BT documents, recruiting, selecting, performance and rewards (Rutherford and Ollerearnshaw, 2002: 25).

The report explains that integration is about 'widening the scope of diversity work and entails having an understanding that all parts of the decision-making processes in a business have the potential for discrimination – not just the employment processes' (ibid: 26). However, we can also understand integration as not only an extension of where discrimination may be found, but also how discrimination may be hidden in apparently non-discriminatory processes: '[t]otal integration or mainstreaming,⁹⁴ not only puts systems in place and monitors the obvious and tangible outcomes of policy, but investigates neutral looking policies and practices themselves for bias towards one group of people' (ibid: 26).

Integration is similar, then, to the idea behind targets already looked at above. It links up with the idea of culture, because one way of understanding how these hidden discriminatory practices remain hidden is through an organisation's taken-for-granted culture. This is the central theme of a report carried out on behalf of the Cabinet Office into the 'under-representation of women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities in the senior civil service'. Here it is stated that 'the main barrier [to equality and diversity] is perceived to be a deeply embedded culture, which has the impact of excluding those who are different. In the main, this is not a question of overt discrimination or prejudice, it is an altogether more subtle (and less conscious) process' (Schneider, 1999: 4).

⁹⁴ The term 'mainstreaming' is used more in the public sector, as pointed out in the report. It is also noted that mainstreaming is '[p]romoted strongly by the European Commission' where it 'moves beyond equal treatment and even positive action approaches to equal opportunities to: "*the incorporation of EO [equal opportunities] issues into all actions, programmes and policies from the outset*"' (Rutherford and Ollerearnshaw, quoting Rees, 2002: 26).

A good part of the concrete operation of equality and diversity policies consists, then, in locating and correcting these seemingly neutral policies within organisations. One report contains some examples from surveyed organisations. For instance, an already mentioned company, BT

provide an example of undoing unintended bias within its appraisal system. On an individual level reviews appeared to be fair, but when they looked at the total, a trend emerged which showed that women were consistently scoring less in certain competencies – direction setting, strategy and analysis. And they saw a trend in which ethnic minorities scored less in team communication.

The report then adds that these:

results could have been attributable to the fact that women and ethnic minorities were: (1) indeed acting according to stereotype or (2) that they were merely being perceived to act in that stereotype by their managers. It is obviously hard to distinguish the two.

What did matter, however, was that these competencies in which they scored lowly were valued highly in the appraisal system. The discovery of these trends led BT to start looking at the values that were placed on certain skills as well as issuing much more focused guidance to managers who did appraisals (Rutherford and Ollerearnshaw, 2002: 26).

In this case, having discovered an inequality of outcome (which, it should be noted, is what is meant here by 'unintended bias') in terms of how minority groups were doing in appraisals it is, interestingly, unimportant whether this is in fact reflective of a natural difference between minority and majority (i.e. if they were 'indeed acting according to stereotype'), or whether this inequality merely *appears* to reflect a natural difference. Either way, this inequality/bias needs to be corrected through adjusting the process (part of the 'objective systems') through which the appraisal is carried out.

It should also be mentioned that important to this project of culture change is an emphasis on the need to change the behaviour, values and beliefs of

individuals within organisations. As it is put by one company in *Talent not Tokenism*:

Our experience has shown that building a strong business case for diversity, making it a strategic imperative backed up by policies and processes is just not enough. Tackling the complexity of organisational culture requires a focus on what drives behaviour – this has taken us into the realms of organisational psychology so that we can each better understand ourselves and thus each other (CBI, 2008: 11).

At times it is made clear that what is subject to control by organisations is specifically individual *behaviour* and not states of mind such as values, beliefs, attitudes and so on. A manager in one report is quoted as saying that: '[w]e say yes, you can have your personal views, but your behaviours at work must express the company values. We are very, very tough and will sack anyone who transgresses these' (Rutherford and Ollerearnshaw, 2002: 42). A few pages later it is reported that, at the same company, 'the focus on behaviours cuts through any argument on what people are really thinking. They [the managers] accept that there will be resentment, ridicule and backlash but have made a company policy of not accepting any expression of it in the workplace' (ibid: 52).

At other times, however, something more 'spiritual', more deeply-embedded in the minds of employees needs to be targeted. Take these two examples from the Runnymede discourse, which while from an NGO is nevertheless clearly reflective of the diversity management discourse:

Racial equality of opportunity needs to be broadly aligned with resourcing, so that the diversity consciousness is always there when making key decisions about succession and filling pivotal posts. Requiring suppliers of talent to develop that racial equality consciousness too is very important, given their role in accessing the talent pool (Sanglin-Grant, 2002: 5).

Another Runnymede report, on the topic of language and the importance of communication in the promotion of equality and diversity, argues that beliefs can be 'very powerful' in 'shaping how an organisation operates, so there might

be strong beliefs that need to be addressed and changed before the behaviours can become more inclusive' (Sanglin-Grant, 2003: 8).

This last aspect of 'culture change' (focusing on individual behaviour and psychology), especially in the form of diversity workshops and 'race awareness training' (RAT), has attracted critical attention, and ridicule, from both the left and right.⁹⁵ Indeed, the idea of focusing on organisational culture more generally, has, just as we saw with the focus on the individual above, attracted critics from the left for entailing 'softer' diversity measures at the expense of 'harder' equality ones. Miller (1996: 207), for example, argues that 'it is easier to appear to address organizational culture, which may indeed have some positive outcomes *vis a vis* the treatment of workers in an organization rather than tackle the "harder" issues of *access* and *reward* and ultimately *power* within organizations'. However, at the same time there is undoubtedly also recognition that some of the impetus behind 'culture change' meets more critical voices in shining a spotlight on apparently neutral practices within organisations that in fact disadvantage particular groups – as is conceded in the quote from Miller just cited. Kirton and Greene (2005: 125) also understand it as 'meeting one of the major criticisms of the dominant liberal equality approach', and add that it is 'one area where various terms within the [more radical] "difference" literature converge with "managing diversity"'.

5.4 Conclusion

A key finding, more generally, in this chapter is that the emphasis on 'diversity' in diversity management should not be seen as a replacement of equality as such. Rather, I believe that what the two case studies analysed in this chapter demonstrate is that diversity management is best viewed as a deployment of the framework described in the previous chapter – one that requires the balancing of equality and diversity, albeit with a firmer emphasis on the latter than we find elsewhere, particularly in the individualist sense of this term. This clearly neoliberal-influenced refinement of the framework undoubtedly causes

⁹⁵ Sivanandan's (1990: 77-122) critique of RAT is well known in the literature. From an alternative, right-wing, perspective see Wood (2003: 202).

tensions with equality and diversity's more politicised adherents. However its basic ideological success in gaining support for group-based equality measures in the workplace should not be underestimated. As Thomas and Gabarro put it: '[i]t was hard to find anyone who liked affirmative action or who was for quotas. On the other hand, it was equally hard to find anyone who was against diversity and inclusion' (quoted in Ben-Galim et al, 2007: 22). This is despite the fact that, as Kirton and Greene (2005: 131) again argue, in practice 'many diversity policies look very similar to that within a traditional equality approach' and 'social groups appear very salient, despite the rhetoric'.⁹⁶ This seems to be a good example, then, of the effectiveness of ideology in enabling the reproduction of contested social practices.

In relation to this point, it is also worth drawing attention again to the early date of what is certainly the key text in this chapter: *From Equality to Diversity* (Schneider-Ross, 1992). This timing gives us a useful insight into one precise point at which diversity is offered as a new approach by an organisation in response to the conflicts and resistances that had been generated towards the end of the 1980s over the promotion of equal opportunities. As we've seen, as a result of this deadlock what was considered both practically possible and politically necessary was an *integration* of the framework into the everyday workings of organisations, with the aim that equality and diversity would become part of the common-sense understanding of individuals and how they relate to each other. In this way, as I've suggested, the precise nature of difference that diversity names can be understood as arising from this process of integration, rather than simply pre-existing it in the form of various group characteristics.

Finally, the business case – as outlined in the first section of this chapter – is the key discursive device directly linking the equality and diversity framework with the corporate pursuit of profit. This is undoubtedly reflective of the more general phenomenon in neoliberal societies of the need to justify social policies

⁹⁶ On this point see Liff & Wajcman (1996: 84) and also Miller (1996: 207). Also, Schneider-Ross themselves make clear, in an article on the UK government's review of equality then being undertaken, the 'new system under consideration [i.e. diversity management – the new 'diversity' approach to equal opportunities] *recognises that particular groups face discrimination* but it also embraces diversity' (Schneider, 2002: 21 – my emphasis). As the emphasised content illustrates, diversity includes a continued recognition of group inequality.

in economic terms. Not just in the case of business either: the Equal Opportunities Commission (former gender-equality watchdog that has now been disbanded) linked equality with 'economic efficiency' in 1991 (as cited in Schneider-Ross, 1992: xxi); Gordon Brown also offers words to this effect in 1996 when he argued that 'now in the 1990s in the new economy, equality of opportunity is also the key to economic prosperity' (quoted in Callinicos, 2000: 38). More specifically, the business case highlights the necessity of 'translating' the terms involved in order to extend the equality and diversity framework to interests that were previously thought to be excluded. The business case plays an important role, then, in the successful journey from left-wing local-government interventions in community politics to the board rooms of large multinational corporations.

Once again, this would appear to be a case of ideology over practice: serious academic studies of the claims that 'diversity' can improve the 'bottom-line' appear to be, at best, sceptical. Wrench (2005: 78-9), for example, has cited a literature review that examined the empirical findings of 33 studies on the potential benefit to businesses of diversity. The authors of this review (Wise and Tschirhart) conclude that, in their words, '[g]iven the weaknesses in the body of research on diversity, we can draw no firm conclusion for public administrators. We cannot claim that diversity has any clear positive or negative effects on individual, group or organizational outcomes'. The undoubted ubiquity and influence of the business case, and indeed the diversity management discourse more generally, is perhaps better understood then in terms of the expansion of the equality and diversity framework to appeal to different (and in this case, very powerful) social interests. In other words it can be understood, using the theoretical terms of the second chapter, as part of the framework's transformation from a 'myth' into a 'social imaginary'.

Chapter Six: Equality, Diversity and the Law

In the previous chapter we saw that one of Schneider-Ross' central arguments is that, while the law serves a useful purpose in setting minimum standards, it cannot be relied upon in order to make sustained progress. Take this passage as an example of this argument:

Most employers seem prepared to do the minimum to ensure that they are not at risk of being punished, but they will not go any further. The law, therefore, has some deterrent effect. However, because the law defines discrimination in terms of the groups who are most likely to suffer it, over-concentration on the law turns equal opportunities into a confrontational issue. There is a 'them' and an 'us'...The law marks a starting point, not the finishing point (Ross and Schneider, 1992: 19-20).

In the context of diversity management, then, the impact of diversity, as examined in the previous chapter, is to take us away from the law into the transformation of organisational processes and culture. In contrast, in this chapter I want to focus on how diversity has had an impact on the development of the law itself. While the law may indeed mark a 'starting point' – a way of setting minimum standards for individual and organisational behaviour – it is a starting point that has been transformed since Ross and Schneider wrote the above in 1992, and the concept of diversity has, as I will show, played a key role in these changes.

I should make it clear that I will not attempt to provide a critical analysis or assessment of equalities law,⁹⁷ which would involve looking closely at the concepts involved and the cases where it has been applied. I will also not be looking in any detail at the party politics behind the various developments that I describe. My aim in this chapter is more specific: it is to trace the impact of the equality and diversity framework on the law through a number of key developments: 1) the increasing emphasis on equality legislation as applicable to *all* individuals in society, not just minority groups; 2) the shift, within the law,

⁹⁷ I use the term 'equalities law', or simply 'equality law', to reflect the fact that I include in this chapter developments that take the law beyond the concept of discrimination. This distinction between discrimination law and equalities law will become clearer below.

from a prohibition of discrimination against individuals to a wider concern with the social structures and institutions generating inequality; 3) the consolidation and rationalisation of equalities legislation; 4) the recognition of socio-economic inequality within equalities law.

The case study organisation – whose texts I will use to explore these developments – is the New Labour government. In other words, my focus is on the executive of the British state headed by the Labour Party, from its return to power in 1997 until its defeat in the 2010 general election. As with the other chapters, it is worth saying a few words about both the political and administrative wings of this executive. The political wing, the Labour Party, is one of the two largest political parties in the United Kingdom. Formally social-democratic in ideology, it has played an important role in the historical development of ideas of equality and diversity in Britain since the Second World War. While for some, as a ruling party, it has had to make too many concessions and compromises along the way thereby undermining its progressive intentions, it is also the case that it has introduced all of Britain's race relations legislation⁹⁸ and generally been, in the view of a recent study, the 'principal site of struggles for minority representation' (Pitcher, 2007: 31).⁹⁹ Its legacy in power during the period being studied here could be seen as similarly ambiguous: certainly that is the view of some commentators who have argued that New Labour policies on race contain both progressive and reactionary elements (Back et al, 2002).¹⁰⁰ However, despite the reservations of critics, what cannot be disputed is the critical role played by the Labour party in establishing equality and diversity as elements of a ruling ideology.

The administrative wing of the executive – the various government departments responsible for producing the texts that I will look at – is harder to describe for two reasons. Firstly, the government department that is now responsible for equality and diversity issues, the Government Equalities Office, wasn't set up until 2007. Before that a specialised non-departmental unit was created in 1997,

⁹⁸ Indeed, all equality legislation more generally with the exception of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 which was introduced by the Conservatives (Macnair, 2010: 3).

⁹⁹ We saw in chapter three, for example, how it was under, specifically, Labour councils that the multicultural policies of the early 1980s were introduced.

¹⁰⁰ Newman also makes this argument (2001: 172).

the Women's Unit, which became the Women and Equality Unit in 2001 signifying its take-up of more general equality issues alongside that of gender. It worked with a number of different departments at different times making it hard to single out specific departments as responsible for the agenda.¹⁰¹ Secondly, the departments themselves have been subject to change in terms of both name and areas of responsibility. Despite this it is possible to pick out two departments that reflect the two main ways in which equality and diversity impacts on the work of government. The Department for Communities and Local Government (created in May 2006 from the then Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, which had previously been the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions until May 2002) tends to deal more with equality as a community-relations issue. The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (created in June 2009 through the merger of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills and the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform – the latter was the Department of Trade and Industry until June 2007) tends to deal with equality as an employment issue.

As for the texts that I have used to trace the developments described below, I have focused on a relatively small number of government documents. These include consultations on proposed legislative changes to equalities law (the Discrimination Law Review, *A Framework for Fairness*, is particularly useful in this regard), and two reports (interim and final) of the Equalities Review, commissioned by Tony Blair to look at the root causes of inequality in society and which went on to inform the legislative changes just mentioned. Other documents looked at include guides to legislation (such as *A Fairer Future*, which provides an overview of the 2010 Equality Act) and also correspondence between the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the government's Solicitor General, Vera Baird, at the time of the 2010 Act – this last source provides some particularly useful insights into the government's thinking behind the Act.

¹⁰¹ As Squires and Wickham-Jones (2004: 88) point out, the idea of a unit working across different departments was a product of New Labour's modernisation program: 'joined-up government' meant developing policies without being 'constrained by departmental boundaries'. The Social Exclusion Unit, which I will be looking at in chapter six, is the better-known example of this.

6.1 Equalities Law and the Individual

The first, probably most obvious, way in which equalities law has changed is simply the expansion of the prohibition of discrimination to cover new grounds. The early legislation of the 1960s and 1970s applied to gender and race, prohibiting unequal treatment on these grounds, and this was followed by legislation to outlaw disability discrimination in 1995. During the following years the number of grounds grew further still. The 2010 Equality Act lists nine 'protected characteristics', which include, alongside those already mentioned: sexual orientation, religion or belief, age, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, and gender reassignment.

What is of particular interest here is the link between this expansion of the law and an increasing focus on the individual within the equality agenda. As we have seen, the individual is an important aspect of the diversity management discourse where there is a clear attempt to shift the focus away from group concerns – the latter are seen to threaten the foundational importance of the individual in a meritocratic society. The recognition of different inequalities contributes to this move, replacing single group identities with the individual who may be subject to many different types of discrimination. As Ross and Schneider (1992: 51) argued in the previous chapter, the 'danger associated with tackling the issue piecemeal, one group at a time, is that one group, often women, receives a great deal of attention and little thought is given, for instance, to people with disabilities, ethnic minorities or older people'. The same point is perhaps made even clearer by Thomas (1990: 114):

Managers usually see affirmative action and equal employment opportunity as centering on minorities and women, with very little to offer white males. The diversity I'm talking about includes not only race, gender, creed, and ethnicity but also age, background, education, function, and personality differences. The objective is not to assimilate minorities and women into a dominant white male culture but to create a dominant heterogeneous culture.

Here there is an appeal to various characteristics beyond race and gender with no obvious link to inequality (such as personality differences), and with no

obvious limit as to what can be included.¹⁰² In contrast, when it comes to the law there is a need to clarify and rationalise what characteristics should count in the prohibition of discrimination.¹⁰³ However, despite this difference, there is, I think, a similar 'individualising tendency' (to use John Wrench's phrase) at work in the extension of equality legislation to an increasing number of grounds.

Evidence for this claim can be found in the foreword to one government document, where Barbara Roche argues that there is a need to 'move beyond the idea that discrimination legislation is only about protecting minority groups, important though that is. It is now very much about providing protection for everyone – for example, we will all be covered by the age regulations being introduced under the Article 13 Race and Employment Directives' (Department of Trade and Industry, 2002). Further on it is stated that:

People are increasingly looking for equal treatment that respects the many facets of their identities. Everyone's identity has multiple aspects, drawing for example on their gender, age, ethnicity and religious affiliations among other characteristics. As people recognise the strengths Britain draws from diversity, they are becoming more conscious of this (ibid).

In other words, there is a need to shift the focus from minority group identities to the different 'facets' or 'aspects' that constitute every individual's identity.

This idea is taken a step further with an increasing focus in the literature on the issue of 'multiple discrimination', leading up to the recent Equality Act 2010 where it is, for the first time, the subject of legislation. In chapter three I noted the impact of the critique of identity on earlier formulations of multiculturalism and the development of a theory of 'intersectionality': this is where attention is paid to the points at which inequality arises due to a combination of characteristics, and can only be properly understood and responded to if this

¹⁰² According to one article, the diversity programme of a business in the United States, Federated Department Stores, went from covering two groups (women and minorities) to 26 groups in just six years (Daniels cited by Wrench, 2005: 76).

¹⁰³ While, as I've said, I won't enter into the complexities of how characteristics are judged to be eligible for protection under the law, it's worth noting that the decision tends to revolve around a number of central criteria: the existence of a group identity of some kind relating to the characteristic (e.g. an ethnic identity); the 'immutability' of the characteristic such that matters of 'lifestyle choice', for example, are excluded; also, evidence of discrimination against the group defined by the characteristic (see Fredman, 2002: 67-82).

combination is taken into account. 'Multiple discrimination' is, in effect, the application of this theoretical idea to equalities law. Alongside the idea then of, what might be called, the 'multi-faceted' individual, potentially subject to a number of different grounds of discrimination, emerges an idea of the interaction of these different inequalities and the effect of this on the individual subject.¹⁰⁴

A Framework for Fairness gives this explanation of the concept of multiple discrimination:

Our discrimination law protects everyone in our society from unfair treatment on the basis of a number of different characteristics – their sex (including gender reassignment), race, disability, sexual orientation, age and religion or belief. People therefore belong to more than one protected group. If a person experiences discrimination, it may sometimes be hard to disentangle which of their protected characteristics is driving the less favourable treatment to which they have been subjected, or whether more than one protected characteristic was involved; they may have experienced multiple discrimination (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007: 122).

Multiple discrimination is a recognition by the government, then, of the complexity of discrimination as it arises in society, that it is difficult to 'disentangle' the different types of characteristic that may be implicated in an individual's disadvantage. The key idea being captured here is not simply a disadvantage in which one ground is *added* to another, in the sense that ethnic minority women (a commonly used example of multiple discrimination within the literature) face racism – considered as a single 'protected ground' – as well as sexism – considered as another, separate, 'protected ground'. Rather, race and sex are understood to combine to produce a qualitatively distinct disadvantage with a distinct group subject to it – in this case, ethnic minority women.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Ben-Galim et al draw a strong link between this idea and the rise of diversity: for them 'recognising and addressing multiple inequalities' is '*central* to the concept of diversity' (2007: 25 – my emphasis).

¹⁰⁵ A government consultation on the subject makes this distinction between '*additive* multiple discrimination' and '*intersectional* multiple discrimination': in the former a person suffers from discrimination on two grounds, but, 'although the two forms of discrimination happen at the same time, they are not related to each other'; in the latter, however, 'it is the unique combination of characteristics that results in discrimination, in such a way that they are completely inseparable'

As is the case in relation to the extension of characteristics to be protected by law, there is clearly a need to set limits to this recognition of multiple discrimination when it comes to transferring this concept into legislation. In this sense, the recognition of complexity, the 'entangled' causes of inequality in the passage above, is, to a certain extent, counter-balanced by pragmatic concerns requiring the simplification of the proposed legislation. For example, the government made the decision to limit the possibility of multiple-discrimination claims to two characteristics, not three or more. Vera Baird, in response to the Joint Committee on Human Rights' questioning of this limit, gives two main reasons for the decision: 1) that two characteristics are sufficient to cover most multiple discrimination cases; 2) that more than two characteristics could be burdensome for employers:

A higher number of permitted combinations could make the law more complex and significantly increase the burdens for employers.¹⁰⁶ Therefore, the proposal based on combinations of two protected characteristics would ensure, in the Government's view that protection is provided for the great majority of incidents of multiple discrimination, without imposing disproportionate burdens (Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2009: Ev 73).

There is, then, a clearly perceived need on the part of the government – as when deciding what counts as a ground of discrimination – to ensure that the law reflects real inequality in society and does not legislate unless there is a good reason to. In an era of unquestioned neoliberalism (certainly by mainstream political parties) avoiding 'burdens' on business is also an important factor – something stressed throughout the New Labour discourse.

A similar shift towards the individual is noticeable in the method used by the Equalities Review to analyse inequality in society. The interim report sets out the thinking behind this shift:

(Government Equalities Office, 2009b: 11). It is only the latter type that was not covered by equalities law before the 2010 Equality Act.

¹⁰⁶ Interestingly, there is a precise numerical limit to this complexity: Baird comments that '[i]f unlimited (in number and as to protected characteristics), there are 511 possible combinations' that would have to be considered (Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2009: Ev 73).

when we came to consider the framework within which we might determine our priorities for action we concluded that the traditional approach of considering inequality by 'strand' or domain – that is to say, by reference to the broad effect of non-socio-economic markers [identity-based characteristics, in other words] – is increasingly unhelpful. This approach typically compares average outcomes for large groups – the pay levels or educational achievement of millions of women, ethnic minorities, lesbians and gays – with those of the rest of society. The difference between the averages tells us a lot but not always the whole story about equality penalties. In some instances the variation within a group is much larger than the average difference with the rest of society... There is also a wider political and cultural reason for a modernised framework for our analysis. The focus on correlating unjust inequality with groups defined by domain (the equality 'strand' framework) has led some unfairly to label many perfectly reasonable efforts at reducing inequality 'political correctness' (Equalities Review, 2006: 9).

'More justifiably', the report adds,

it has been suggested that it [the group-based approach] invites a demoralising sense of victimhood amongst disadvantaged groups on the one hand; and on the other it leads even those well-disposed towards, say, ethnic minorities or disabled people to consider all Asians or wheelchair users as somehow deficient and one-dimensional, defined entirely by the one aspect of their lives (ibid).

There is a need then for a different 'framework' on which to base the analysis, one that moves away from the group-based model for reasons of both accuracy of results and moral/political considerations.

A new approach is then set out:

we propose that we see the emerging inequalities in a different way, which recognises that chronic and persistent inequalities leading to penalties are the product of two key measurable dimensions. One dimension is what we call vulnerability, distinguished by membership of a social group defined by class, race, gender and so forth.¹⁰⁷ The other dimension is based on our finding that whilst many persistent and unjust inequalities are disproportionately associated with some vulnerable groups it often takes a specific life event, or a trigger episode for the

¹⁰⁷ As we will see in the final section of this chapter, in the Equalities Review class is *not* in fact treated as the characteristic of an unequal group in an analogous sense to race and gender, as this sentence suggests.

penalty to take effect. It is the combination of vulnerability and a trigger episode in a field such as education, employment or health which helps to identify a specific target for action against inequality (ibid: 10).

The answer then is not to reject the use of 'non-socio-economic markers' (identity-based characteristics) entirely, instead they need to be combined with life-events so as to locate the specific points at which group identity interacts with individual lives, rather than assuming a blanket outcome for all members of that group. We see the shift in emphasis towards the individual not just in the legislation itself, then, but also in the kind of analytical frameworks used by the government to understand inequality.

A final development worth mentioning here is that equality and human rights are seen as two increasingly close and complementary fields of government responsibility – as illustrated, for example, in the new equality body: the Equality and Human Rights Commission (see below for more on this body). As the government explains:

Bringing together equality and human rights in the new Commission marks an important shift in the way we think about equality. It places equality firmly in the context of people's fundamental rights and freedoms. It recognises that we are all a complex mixture of the different characteristics that influence how we see the world and how the world sees us. These issues matter to all of us, not just those facing discrimination. They are about how people deal with and respect each other in 21st century Britain; how we ensure that our communities are strong and cohesive and allow people to flourish (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007: 11).

Placing equality 'in the context of people's fundamental rights and freedoms' can be seen as another way in which equality policies are linked with the individual – this time in relation to the individual as a citizen, a holder of rights in a liberal-democratic society. Of course, seeking to bring group-based equality claims alongside more traditional individual rights such as freedom of speech in this way is not without its problems. For now, it is enough simply to note the attempt to do this. In chapter eight I will look at the conflicts that arise as a result of this attempt and the response, within equality and diversity discourse, to those conflicts.

6.2 From Discrimination to Inequality

As is the case with diversity management, the recognition of the rights-endowed individual, potentially subject to discrimination on a variety of grounds, is combined with, rather than a replacement of, an acknowledgement of the group-based nature of this discrimination. In particular, social structures and institutions are increasingly seen as the cause of this discrimination, not merely individual behaviour and prejudice. The second chapter of the final report of the Equalities Review, *Fairness and Freedom*, describes this historical shift in how the concept of discrimination is understood and how that is reflected in legislation. Here, the concept of indirect discrimination is said to emerge from the recognition that the formal anti-discrimination measures outlawing direct discrimination established in the 1960s and early 1970s were not enough to shift deeper inequalities:

it was increasingly evident that efforts to stamp out specific individual acts of direct discrimination would not be sufficient to eliminate the disadvantage faced by women or ethnic minorities. This 'indirect' discrimination took a far subtler form, not an overt bias against a particular individual, but barriers likely to affect a *kind* of person – far harder to spot and much more difficult to prevent (Equalities Review, 2007: 34).

Here, the existence of deeper inequalities that cannot be remedied through standard anti-discrimination measures leads to a redefinition and expansion of discrimination as a concept, rather than its rejection: *indirect* discrimination recognises that there are 'barriers' built into supposedly neutral institutions that disadvantage particular groups.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ We have already seen how an equivalence between race and gender has played a strategic role in the development of discrimination law in both Britain and the United States: in chapter three I noted that legislative gains had been won for one ground by drawing an equivalence with the other ground that had, at the time, comparably more advanced legislation relating to it. Interestingly, in *Fairness and Freedom* we see a similar move recorded in the development of the idea of indirect discrimination, but this time involving disability: the 'insight that discrimination might not be restricted solely to consciously prejudicial acts by one individual against another was a profound breakthrough in all aspects of equality. In the field of disability, the development of the "social model of disability" began to change the way in which people thought about equality overall. This view held that disadvantages faced by disabled people arose less from their particular impairment, and more from the way that society constructed (often literally) the world and erected barriers. This meant that campaigning efforts shifted from a focus on a disabled person's particular impairment(s) to the action that should be taken to remove barriers faced by disabled people in everyday life' (Equalities Review, 2007: 34). This is a useful strategic move, I would suggest, because the idea of

More recent developments have then built on this important idea:

In 1999, the gradual trend towards focusing less on individual acts of prejudice and more on the way in which systems and organisations routinely disadvantaged entire categories of people reached its most radical, and controversial, stage. Prompted by a sustained community campaign led by the family of the murdered teenager Stephen Lawrence, the report of the Macpherson Inquiry introduced the term 'institutional racism' to Britain. Though widely misinterpreted to mean that all individuals in an institution should be regarded as racist, a close reading of the report shows that the idea behind the term was exactly the reverse: that even where there was good will and substantial effort by individuals to eliminate different kinds of discrimination, the rules, culture and habits of a particular body could frustrate efforts to stamp out disadvantage (ibid: 35).

Here we have the familiar idea of indirect discrimination in a new, more politicised form: institutional racism. In order to combat this problem 'Macpherson proposed a new idea': a public sector duty designed to bring about racial equality (ibid).¹⁰⁹ The importance of the Lawrence inquiry in relation to this new idea is also mentioned by Robin Schneider who, while generally wary of relying on legislation (as we have seen), nonetheless welcomes the duty as an important tool in promoting change:

I share the prevailing assumption that regulation may not provide the best motivation for organisations to change. However, what the Stephen Lawrence case showed all too graphically is that we can't just rely on good intentions.

Despite fine words from the top about the desire for racial equality, getting everyone to pause and properly work through the implications in the way that they go about their day-to-day jobs takes systematic planning.

The public duty to promote racial equality and good race relations is a piece of regulation, which requires public sector organisations to take this systematic approach (Schneider-Ross, 2003: 2).

indirect discrimination is surely easier to demonstrate, and also, more importantly, to 'sell' to a sceptical public, in the case of disability than in relation to race or gender.

¹⁰⁹ In fact, this was not a completely new idea as something similar had been introduced in the 1976 Race Relations Act, though applying only to local authorities (I am grateful to Neil Cobb for pointing this out to me).

In other words, the Stephen Lawrence case shows that an ethical or business case aimed at an enlightened leadership is not enough; what is required is legislation that will help to embed equality policies at the heart of institutions and change the way those institutions operate.

Once again, the development in discrimination law here mirrors developments described in the previous chapter, particularly the idea of 'integration' or 'mainstreaming':

The public duty is, in effect, legislation which is deliberately designed to bring about 'mainstreaming' of racial equality. This is about ensuring that racial equality is not a separate 'add on', but an integral part of how an organisation goes about all its activities...In other words, it is about institutional change – getting the concept of inclusion into the bloodstream of an organisation so that it reaches every part of the body – and therefore everything it does (ibid: 13).

In fact, this idea of mainstreaming was already underway in relation to government policy-making as early as 1998. Then, a short document written for civil servants entitled 'Policy Appraisal for Equal Treatment' was circulated stating that

Government Departments must take full account of the needs and experiences of those affected by their policies. We must understand how policy can have a different impact on different groups in society. We have to bring this understanding to policy development and work to ensure that the results are fair, lawful and practical, and promote equal opportunities in its widest sense.

This means that in policy making and employment practice, we have to consider the impact on those who have found the actions and attitudes of others placing obstacles in the way of equality of opportunity. Most particularly, the impact upon women, people from different ethnic minorities and disabled people. This process has come to be known as "mainstreaming". These guidelines are intended to help officials bring about that shift (Cabinet Office, 1998).¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ In fact, according to an EDF (Equality and Diversity Forum) text, the Conservatives introduced an earlier version of such guidelines in 1992 (O'Cinneide, 2004: 18).

We can see then the relatively early emergence of a theme that will be taken up and radicalised in the idea of a duty – radicalised in the sense that the latter applies, in principle, to organisational activities across the public sector (not just governmental policy making), and, most importantly, in the sense that a duty is cemented in law.

The significance of the duties (the race equality duty was joined by duties in relation to gender and disability) is that they represent a 'qualitative change from the law that preceded them'. The key shift being that up until then the law had taken the form of a negative duty *not* to discriminate, but here public sector bodies must:

- 'give due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity' (this is called the 'general duty')
- then perform specific actions in order to carry out this general duty (referred to as the 'specific duties') (Macnair, 2010: 5).

A duty differs then from the concept of indirect discrimination. While the latter extends the meaning of discrimination to capture how apparently neutral features of social structures (practices, procedures, culture etc) may disadvantage a 'kind of person' (as the Equalities Review puts it), it still puts the burden on victims to bring attention to specific cases where discrimination has occurred. A duty, on the other hand, provides a more general recognition of inequality in society with the burden for change placed squarely on public bodies. As Sandra Fredman (2002: 122) explains: '[e]ven indirect discrimination requires proof that an individual employer has imposed a practice or condition which excludes disproportionate numbers of women or blacks. At the root of the positive duty, by contrast, is a recognition that societal discrimination extends well beyond individual acts of racist prejudice'. The solution to the problem changes accordingly: from the compensation of individual victims, in the case of indirect discrimination, to 'restructuring institutions'.

The significant point here is that while indirect discrimination could be said to have 'stretched' the concept of discrimination in order to move beyond the

treatment of individuals,¹¹¹ the idea of an equality duty moves beyond the concept of discrimination altogether. Discrimination law becomes *equalities* law: an attempt to legislate against social inequality in a much more general sense. As Sarah Spencer from the EDF has explained: this new approach 'broadens the goal, from tackling one cause of inequality, discrimination, to the promotion of equality – tackling whichever barriers are standing in the way' (Spencer, 2007).

The idea of a duty should also be distinguished from positive action. Positive action, as we have already seen, is an important aspect of the diversity management discourse and it is defended by the government as a necessary practice in similar terms. To take one example: '[a]llowing voluntary positive measures by political parties when selecting candidates [e.g. imposing all-female shortlists] is designed to overcome a persistent though generally unconscious bias against candidates who break the usual mould, or who are thought of as “risky” – perhaps because they are female and/or from an ethnic minority group' (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007: 77). It is also worth noting that the same danger is acknowledged by the government that we saw in the previous chapter: that legitimate positive action will slide into illegitimate positive discrimination. For example:

There is currently confusion about what types of positive action measures are and are not allowed under our discrimination law. Perhaps most crucially, the lack of a clearly understood purpose for positive action measures gives rise to confusion with positive discrimination. This risks fostering unjustified concern about favouritism being shown to disadvantaged groups. Instead, we want everyone to recognise there may be occasions when positive action to address their particular needs may help them, and that this can actually lead to a fairer outcome for all (ibid: 72).

However, as I say, there is an important difference between positive action and a duty.¹¹² While they are both described by the government as 'balancing measures' (ibid: 70), positive action is a voluntary policy option, to be used as and when required in response to specific situations where there is a need to

¹¹¹ As Jopke has put it: indirect discrimination provisions 'created a space for the language of group rights and for the result-oriented logic of achieving statistical parity between the races' (quoted in Bleich, 2003: 104).

¹¹² Again, I am grateful to Neil Cobb for his thoughts on this distinction.

prevent or compensate for group disadvantage. A duty, by contrast, is a mandatory requirement that aims to permanently change the institutional environment. As an EDF report on the subject explains, the latter ensures that organisations are more willing to use potentially controversial policies, such as positive action. By 'requiring proactive action', duties

give a legal backbone to mainstreaming and equal opportunities policies [such as positive action measures], both strengthening their “internal” development and ensuring an “external” compliance standard. By compelling the taking of adequately implemented procedural steps, they create a climate of openness to new diversity initiatives and ensure a greater focus upon the proactive promotion of equality (O'Cinneide, 2004: 79-80).

We can see here then something of the nuanced relationship between the mandatory/permanent and the voluntary/temporary, and the importance of both types of action in the functioning of equality and diversity as an ideology. On the one hand, equality policies that require differential treatment (such as positive action measures) need to remain a temporary response to instances of inequality, in order to avoid the asymmetry between groups introduced (i.e. the preferential treatment of minorities) becoming a permanent feature of social relations. On the other hand, those same policies also require a more permanent institutional base in order to remain effective. A duty provides, then, not just a recognition of the deeply embedded reality of inequality in society, it also provides a way of institutionalising the need to act on this recognition in organisations across society.¹¹³

6.3 The Consolidation of Equalities Law

In October 2002 the government launched a review of equality institutions that was described by them as the 'most significant review of equality in over a quarter of a century'; the review threw up 'vociferous calls for new legislation and a single equality bill' (Squires, 2007: 542, 544). A key issue behind these

¹¹³ Rob Berkeley (2012) – director of Runnymede – has recently described this legal mechanism as a way of 'turning 30,000 public institutions into activists for equality'.

calls was the sheer complexity of discrimination law with different grounds of discrimination covered by different pieces of legislation. Added to this was the impact of both the Human Rights Act 1998 and devolution on equality law; the latter meant that different legislation applied to different parts of the UK (ibid: 544-5). In summary, towards the end of the 2000's discrimination law was made up of a 'patchwork' of (at a minimum) 30 Acts of Parliament, 38 Statutory Instruments, 11 Codes of Practice and 12 EC Directives. According to Squires, this led many of those working in the equality and diversity field to argue that discrimination law 'was itself a source of inequality' with varying levels of protection afforded to different groups in different geographical areas (ibid: 546).

The government, although 'initially resistant', did eventually begin the process of bringing together these different pieces of legislation into a single equality act. The product of a lengthy consultation process, this new act was passed in 2010 with many of its provisions not taking effect until 2011. As a guide to the legislation makes clear: it 'consolidates, simplifies, and improves on the ramshackle protections that previously applied' by bringing 'together in one place those characteristics on which it is unlawful to discriminate and to establish a single approach to discrimination' (Wadham et al: ix).¹¹⁴ While previous legislation dealt with prohibited behaviour that was 'directly tied' to the ground with which it was dealing, the new act has separate chapters dealing with the nine recognised characteristics in need of protection, on the one hand, and the prohibited behaviour, on the other (Karim and Maynard, 2010: 13). This means that '[i]n general, discrimination is defined in the same way for each of the protected characteristics' – though there are, as with any legislation, exceptions to this (Uccellari, 2010: 31).

The Act also introduces a new single equality duty replacing the three previous duties that dealt with race, gender and disability. This extends the idea of a duty to all characteristics included in the Act (with the exception of marital status),

¹¹⁴ It should be noted, though, that this was not the only reason for the legislation. The 'basic case for legislation was presented [by the government] as twofold: first, although the position of some disadvantaged groups was improving, progress was not fast enough; secondly, the government pointed to the present state of the law, describing it as "complex and difficult"... The intention that the Act would not just consolidate and "declutter" or tidy up the relevant law, but improve the position of disadvantaged people, was apparent throughout the preparation and progress of the Bill. Wherever the rights of different victims of discrimination were uneven, they were to be levelled up, not down' (Macnair, 2010: 7-8).

and will therefore require a 'range of public bodies to consider the needs of diverse groups in the community when designing and delivering public services so that people can get fairer opportunities and better public services' (Government Equalities Office, 2009a: 11). We see here how the specific groups covered by the previous duties – women, the disabled and ethnic minorities – have been replaced by the more general idea of 'diverse groups in the community'. This echoes the general trend in legislation towards a focus on the individual that I highlighted in the first section of this chapter: without separate duties for each 'strand' (i.e. the different inequalities covered in the legislation) a public authority is more able to deal with different aspects of inequality as and when they arise, recognising that all individuals are made up of different characteristics that will affect how they are treated.

This consolidation of the law is also supposed to bring improved efficiency. The previous duties had been criticised for being too bureaucratic and process driven (Burnham, 2010: 161). A single equality duty, on the other hand, would enable public bodies to have more autonomy and flexibility in responding to inequality:

Our proposed approach would...mean that the law would no longer specifically require, for example, employment monitoring of different racial groups, but would instead set out the key principles which support effective performance of a single equality duty, and require these to be applied proportionately. This would give public authorities greater autonomy in determining their priority equality objectives and how they will be achieved, by reference to their particular functions and the communities they serve, while ensuring that the duty is performed in an inclusive, evidence-based and transparent way (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007: 93).

One example of this might involve a public body that works in an area of the country with low numbers of people from ethnic minority groups. Employment monitoring in relation to race might in this situation be inappropriate; resources could instead be used for other equality issues that are more prevalent in the area – there may, for example, be evidence of limited facilities for disabled people. In this way the more general concept of inequality at the heart of a

single equality duty would enable a more specific, and therefore more effective, targeting of resources.¹¹⁵

We also find, alongside this new harmonised equality legislation, a replacement of the previous single-ground equality commissions (the CRE, Equal Opportunities Commission and Disability Rights Commission) with a single overarching organisation: the EHRC (Equality and Human Rights Commission). In December 2001, the government stated their belief that 'in the longer term, there are arguments in favour of a single, statutory commission offering integrated advice, guidance and support on equality matters'; it would 'help to ensure a coherent approach to equality issues across the board' (Cabinet Office, 2001: 26). In 2003 Patricia Hewitt similarly argued that a new commission would

give greater support and more joined-up advice to individuals, businesses and communities to crackdown on discrimination, and promote equality and diversity...tackling discrimination in the 21st century requires a joined-up approach that puts equality in the mainstream of concerns. As individuals, our identities are diverse, complex and multi-layered. People don't see themselves as solely a woman, or black, or gay and neither should our equality organizations (quoted by Squires, 2007: 543).

Here we see that – alongside a recognition of issues that have already been explored in relation to the rise of diversity (multiple discrimination, mainstreaming and so on)¹¹⁶ – a new organisation would bring, again, a more

¹¹⁵ It should also be noted that the two aims of the new legislation that I mentioned in footnote 114 are apparent in the formulation of the new duty, in that alongside this process of consolidation there is also an attempt to strengthen the new duty. As Burnham explains (2010: 162-3): 'the general duty has been considerably fortified by the replacement of the requirement to "have due regard to the need to *promote* equality of opportunity" with the obligation to have such regard to the need to *advance* equality of opportunity". The use of the word "advance" does chime with a commitment to make the duty action-based and conjures a potentially measurable target rather than an ephemeral aspiration'.

¹¹⁶ It should also be noted that the concept of diversity is explicitly mentioned in the legislation responsible for creating the new organisation. The responsibility of the EHRC as set out in the 2006 Equality Act is 'to encourage and support the development of a society in which (a) people's ability to achieve their potential is not limited by prejudice or discrimination; (b) there is respect for and protection of each individual's human rights; (c) there is respect for the dignity and worth of each individual; (d) each individual has an equal opportunity to participate in society; and (e) *there is mutual respect between groups based on understanding and valuing of diversity* and on shared respect for equality and human rights' (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2007: 87 – my emphasis).

rationalised and streamlined approach to equality issues (a 'joined-up approach'). This would help to, for example, avoid the 'duplication of functions between organisations' (Department of Trade and Industry, 2002), as all equality issues are brought within the remit of a single institutional structure.

This process of merger has not gone completely unchallenged, however, with some scepticism and concern expressed regarding the ability of different types of inequality to be brought together in one organisation. As Ben-Galim et al (2007: 24) have observed, this "one size fits all" approach has been criticized for its implicit assumptions that inequalities are equivalent'. It is clear from the discourse however that the government do not believe (echoing theories of multiculturalism more generally) that an *equivalence* between inequalities means having to treat them all in the *same way*. In *Making it Happen*, for example, the government argue that equality commissions of other countries 'have been effective in delivering benefits through an integrated approach – for example in promoting good practice across the equality agenda, raising the profile of diversity, and providing integrated advice, *while continuing to meet the needs of the specific groups they serve*', and that there 'must be no loss of focus on the needs of any of the groups, or "strands" covered by equality legislation. Any new body must serve all the strands effectively'. Ultimately, a balance is required: '[w]hatever leading principle is chosen, any such body would need to balance the need for coherence across the organisation, so that an integrated approach to equality is delivered, with the need for proper focus on each strand' (Department of Trade and Industry, 2002 – my emphasis).

The different inequalities (race, gender, disability etc) are, then, considered different but equal. Not only can they be brought together within a single equality act and a single equality commission, a key reason for this process of consolidation is that this will help promote equality between the different 'strands' thereby avoiding a hierarchy of inequalities with varying levels of protection afforded to different grounds. In this sense, in principle, race and gender (which undoubtedly have the longest and most politicised history as inequalities) should be placed on an equal footing with, for example, age (perhaps the least politicised): '[t]he interests of all the groups served must carry equal weight. It would be quite wrong for any group either to predominate or be

marginalised. The mission, structures and processes of any new organisation would need to be designed to ensure these risks were minimised' (Department of Trade and Industry, 2002). It is worth emphasising how widely accepted this principle is within the literature and perhaps helps to explain the relatively smooth progress of the establishment of the EHRC; while there were some tensions surrounding the process – the CRE, in particular, had some concerns – these were generally fairly small-scale and related to the specific details of how it would in practice function, rather than the principle itself.¹¹⁷

6.4 Socio-Economic Inequality and the Law

It should be emphasised that the business case for equality and diversity, and many of the themes of the diversity management discourse more generally, are central to the New Labour government's discourse and its reformulation and development of equality legislation (for a succinct statement see Department of Trade and Industry, 2003). For obvious reasons issues of class and economic inequality are more or less absent from the diversity management discourse with consequences for its use as a way of legitimising government policy. As Squires (2007: 554) argues:

What is striking in relation to the government's framing of the equality review is the centrality of the business case for equality and the absence of 'class' in considerations of inequality...Perhaps because it has framed the pursuit of equality and diversity in terms of a business case, there has been no sustained consideration of economic inequality throughout the consultation period, rendering issues of poverty and mal-distribution marginal to the equality debate.

¹¹⁷ See Squires (2007: 548-554) for an account of the negotiations surrounding the establishment of the EHRC between the government and the equality commissions that would be replaced by it. On the point about the general acceptance of the principle behind the EHRC she writes: the 'key advocates of the six equality strands have generally been very enthusiastic about the government's proposals to create the CEHR [the Commission for Equality and Human Rights – the old name for the EHRC], notwithstanding a difference in framing of equality and diversity concerns. Even the CRE's concerns about the CEHR are focused on the pragmatic detail of remit, location and resources and do not hinge on a principled objection to the proposal. One of the striking things about the consultation process, therefore, has been the consensus in favour of the idea of developing an integrated approach to equality, such that intersectional discrimination might be addressed and a hierarchy of competing equality strands be avoided' (ibid: 552-3).

While this, in general terms, seems a pretty fair assessment, it's worth emphasising that, in contrast with the business-focused literature, concerns about class and economic inequality are not entirely absent from the New Labour discourse – no doubt reflecting the fact that as a governing party, unlike business, there are both the social-order problems that can result from this type of inequality to consider, as well as the need to maintain the Labour vote in working-class constituencies. It is also a concern that clearly increases over time, particularly in the later years of Labour rule.¹¹⁸ This can be illustrated by comparing the treatment of the issue in the Equalities Review (2006-7) with its appearance in the later Equality Act 2010.

As I argued in chapter four, the key feature of the place of socio-economic inequality within the equality and diversity framework is less the varying extent to which the former is an issue, and more the *separation* between this type of inequality and that relating to the presence of disadvantaged identity-based groups in society. We can see that this separation lies at the heart of the Equalities Review. For example, in the foreword to the interim report, Trevor Phillips, chair of the review, describes the influence of Tony Blair on the direction taken:

We were invited by the Prime Minister to consider especially those areas of inequality which are not the product of pure economic disadvantage. It would be unrealistic to suppose that socioeconomic disadvantages would not be a fundamental part of the background to our review. But we concluded very early on in our deliberations that some kinds of inequalities can be identified which are partly or wholly separate from those caused by socio-economic factors...What we have tried to do therefore is to set out the degree to which other kinds of group differences or “domains” besides the ones we traditionally call “class”, may lead to

¹¹⁸ This shift led to anxiety among those in the equality and diversity field that this focus on socio-economic inequality might replace a concern with identity-based inequality. See, for example, Derek McGhee's response to an article by John Denham (former minister at the Department for Communities and Local Government): 'there is a concern that the new discourse (promoted by the Government's Equality Office) that "class" "trumps" other social categories including race, gender, disability and age is a regression from the appreciation of "our" multi-faceted identities and the complex intersectionality of the advantages and disadvantages associated with these different aspects of our identities' (McGhee, 2010: 11). This issue also emerged in the national media after a speech where Denham proposed a more 'complex' approach to equalities, one that would give class more emphasis and that would not assume that ethnic minorities were 'always disadvantaged' (Denham quoted in BBC, 2010b). This move was criticised by a number of commentators – see, for example, Harker (2010).

individuals or groups of individuals suffering unjust inequalities (Equalities Review, 2006: 3).

Socio-economic inequality is considered to be important, then, in the review,¹¹⁹ but it has a distinct role in providing a 'background' against which various group-based inequalities are situated.

This distinction between the two types of inequality enables the review to place the issue of socio-economic inequality outside the main focus of its inquiry. This is made clear in the final report where it's stated that, given the importance of the issue of socio-economic inequality, the review 'welcomes the Government's focus on reducing poverty, increasing employment, tackling social exclusion, improving education and skills, and building neighbourhood and community renewal, as part of its wider role in reducing economic inequality'. However, because of 'factors over and above socio-economic drivers of inequality that affect particular groups to their disadvantage' the 'aim has been to complement the Government's other programmes and to focus on reducing inequalities between disadvantaged groups and the rest of society' (Equalities Review, 2007: 27-8). Socio-economic inequality lies firmly within a different domain of government activity then and, as we will see in the following chapter, this enables it to be channelled into a social exclusion agenda that significantly affects how the issue is dealt with.

However, two years after the publication of *Fairness and Freedom* there is an interesting development in this area, with a relatively late addition to the bill that would become the 2010 Equality Act. A 'socio-economic duty' was proposed that meant that this type of inequality was registered as an issue to be dealt with through equality legislation itself – not something to be bracketed as an issue of social welfare policy as it is in the Equalities Review. This was certainly understood as a significant move by politicians and commentators at the time: it was hailed as 'legislation of extraordinary radicalism' by Polly Toynbee (2009), from the left, and denounced as a return to class warfare by the Conservative opposition, from the right (BBC, 2009). The actual wording of the provision is

¹¹⁹ The final report even goes so far as to call it the 'biggest driver of continuing disadvantage and inequality for many in society' (Equalities Review, 2007: 26).

somewhat more low-key than this reaction might suggest however: '[a]n authority to which this section applies must, when making decisions of a strategic nature about how to exercise its functions, have due regard to the desirability of exercising them in a way that is designed to reduce the inequalities of outcome that result from socio-economic disadvantage' (cited by Burnham, 2010: 169). Hardly the *Communist Manifesto* I think it's safe to say!

As the government explains, the duty 'will affect how public bodies make strategic decisions about spending and service delivery. It will enshrine in the law the role of our key public bodies in narrowing gaps in outcomes resulting from socio-economic disadvantage'. For example:

A local education authority could evaluate the schools application process and find that some parents in social housing were having difficulty navigating the system and getting their child a place at a school. The authority could then target support at people living on housing estates to help them with the application process (Government Equalities Office, 2009a: 10).

The concrete measures proposed do not necessarily differ that much, then, from those carried out under New Labour's social welfare agenda – the Sure Start scheme, for example, deliberately targeted disadvantaged communities in order to help young people from those communities get a better start in life.¹²⁰ As was also acknowledged by a civil servant involved in the development of the proposed legislation at a joint EDF-Runnymede seminar on the subject: it is the kind of action that many public authorities have already been taking. The duty simply provides, as with the identity-based duties, a 'legal backbone' for this work and aims to bring the organisations that aren't performing well in this regard up to the standards of those that are (EDF, 2009b). Its 'radicalism' in practice, the actual impact the duty would have on the large socio-economic inequalities that exist in Britain, is certainly debatable then, and is anyway a purely hypothetical question as the provision has not been carried forward by the present coalition government. Its significance is that, as a duty, it represented an attempt at a legally binding recognition of socio-economic

¹²⁰ In the passage from the Equalities Review (2007: 27-8), cited above, Sure Start is mentioned alongside the New Deal and the National Minimum Wage as examples of the 'Government's other programmes' that deal with economic inequality – in contrast with the Equalities Review.

inequality in society and the necessity for a proactive response to redress this imbalance.

However, despite this attempt to recognise socio-economic inequality within equality legislation – and the use of a legislative device taken from equality legislation to do this (a public sector duty) – the distinction between socio-economic and identity-based inequality remains, as is clear from the need for two separate duties. Interestingly, the question of why socio-economic inequality should not be one of the protected grounds in the 2010 Equality Act, and therefore why two separate duties are needed, is raised by the Joint Committee on Human Rights. Baird's answer is worth quoting at length:

The Government did consider extending protection against discrimination to cover socio-economic status. But it concluded that (a) beyond a crude income or poverty measure, it would be very hard to define socio-economic disadvantage in a way that could be used to give individual rights; and (b) this would not in any case be the best way to address the inequalities of outcome which result from that socio-economic disadvantage.

Socio-economic disadvantage is not like the other protected grounds. It is not a single, unchangeable condition, or a fundamental aspect of someone's being. On the contrary, it is a situation characterised by complex, inter-related factors; and is [a] situation that people will, it is hoped, rise above and move on from. It is a situation that the Government ultimately wishes to eradicate altogether.

However, socio-economic disadvantage underlies, and can manifest itself as a consequence of, many of the inequalities associated with the protected characteristics. But it is not like them, and should not be treated as such. Putting the onus on public bodies specifically to *eliminate discrimination* against people facing socio-economic disadvantage, would not be the best way to address the inequalities of outcome associated with that disadvantage. While it is, of course, possible that some people suffer discrimination, in particular cases, as a result of their socio-economic status, that is not the key cause of the inequalities of outcome we are looking to address. What is required is a measure to address the underlying socio-economic disadvantages (Joint Committee on Human Rights, 2009: Ev 69-70).

Despite its importance, then, 'socio-economic disadvantage' cannot be the basis of individual rights in the way that the other grounds can.¹²¹ Why? The reason given is that unlike the others it is not a 'single, unchangeable condition, or a fundamental aspect of someone's being' – in other words, it is not the basis of an *identity* in the way that the other grounds are.

Furthermore, according to Baird, the cause of each disadvantage differs. The cause of identity-based disadvantage is discrimination; in contrast, socio-economic disadvantage is a 'situation characterised by complex, inter-related factors', which (echoing the Equalities Review) forms a *background* condition of more specific relations of injustice: it (socio-economic disadvantage) 'underlies, and can manifest itself as a consequence of, many of the inequalities associated with the protected characteristics'. The use of the term 'manifest' is interesting here, as it suggests not just a separation between the two types of inequality, but a particular kind of relationship whereby socio-economic inequality only appears as something significant and tangible *through* the various identity-based inequalities recognised in the discourse. Despite, then, superficially appearing as a closure of the gap between socio-economic and identity-based inequality, the socio-economic duty remains, at bottom, a reflection of this ideological separation. Furthermore, the lack of political will shown in failing to implement the duty in law contrasts with the willingness, on the part of the current Conservative-led coalition, to take forward the controversial 'tie-breaker' clause enabling positive discrimination for identity-based groups, further demonstrating the different levels of concern shown to the two types of inequality.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter we have found two developments in equality law that we also found in the diversity management discourse: 1) an increasingly official and radical recognition of identity-based inequality in relation to various protected

¹²¹ The same issue – the difficulty of linking socio-economic concerns with individual rights – was also given as the reason for a separate socio-economic duty by Harriet Harman (the minister in charge of the proposed legislation), when questioned on the issue at the EDF seminar mentioned above (EDF, 2009b).

characteristics. This culminates in the idea of a duty: a legal requirement placed on public bodies that officially recognises the institutionalised inequality that relates to a group's disadvantaged position in society, and, furthermore, places an obligation on that body to proactively act to reverse that inequality. 2) The increasing influence of diversity in linking this recognition of group inequality to the individual as the central rights-bearing subject of contemporary society. Here we see a shift from the idea of a minority group suffering inequality – to which some individuals in society may belong – to the 'diverse' individual composed of a combination of different characteristics that change over the life-course of that individual and that affect how they are treated by society. It is interesting to see then how equality legislation has evolved over time away from the 'them' and 'us' model that, as we saw at the start of this chapter, was the main reason for Robin Schneider's criticism of relying on the law as an engine of social change.

We also find that, as with diversity management, this concern with diversity contains the potential to alienate those most committed to equality, who see it as a weakening of the latter. Ben-Galim et al (2007: 22) undoubtedly speak for others when they warn that:

while diversity speaks to long-standing concerns about cross-cutting inequalities, it tends to be tied to the level of individual opportunity and experience. This is problematic for the practice of anti-discrimination and equal opportunities legislation, particularly in the UK, which has emphasised individual rights and redress...more than the positive action that may be necessary to address group inequalities.

In other words, the danger is that an emphasis on the diverse individual at the heart of equality legislation will be too successful, and will put the continued need for group-based policies in jeopardy.

There are also two more novel features of the discourse that have been considered: 1) the need to consolidate legislation that had become increasingly complex and fragmented due to its ad-hoc development over the years. The function of legislation is to provide basic parameters for behaviour and clearly this task is more successful the more streamlined and straightforward that

legislation is, in accordance with a single, rationalised model of equalities law. As we have seen, this should also help to make the legislation more effective in its application. This is important in responding to often-made criticisms of the overly formal, 'tick box' nature of equality and diversity policies. 2) The recognition of socio-economic inequality as an important issue. Here we saw that the distinction between identity-based and socio-economic inequality begins to cut across (albeit to a limited extent) the distinction between two areas of government work: equality legislation, on the one hand, and social welfare policy on the other. While the two distinctions coincide in the earlier Equalities Review, the proposed socio-economic duty brings this type of inequality into the heart of equality legislation.¹²² However, as I've shown, the underlying logic that separates the two types of inequality is nonetheless maintained.

¹²² According to Macnair (2010: 12), the fact that the 'most novel provisions' of the 2010 Equality Act relating to the socio-economic duty are set-out at the beginning of the Act 'far adrift' from the other, general equality, duty suggests that the government 'may have wished to give them some prominence, possibly at the expense of the logical ordering of the material'.

Chapter Seven: Class, Inequality and Diversity

This chapter is concerned with equality and diversity from the point of view of discourses that take socio-economic or class inequality as their starting point. The two discourses in question relate to the issue in very different ways, however, partly reflecting the important difference between socio-economic inequality and class inequality, but also because the discourses are products of very different organisational aims. The TUC (Trades Union Congress), which I will look at first, is a class-based organisation to the extent that, as a confederation of trade unions, it can be said to represent workers: a specific group that exists in a relationship with employers and the state. As is to be expected – given the historical changes outlined in chapter three – the visibility of class inequality significantly declines over the years from the 1960s to the present day. At the same time – again unsurprisingly – the visibility of non-class inequalities increases. Dealing first with the decline of the idea of class conflict within the TUC discourse and secondly with the rise of diversity, I will try to bring out some of the complexities involved in the relationship between these two developments.

In contrast, the second case study in this chapter – the New Labour government's social exclusion discourse – clearly has something more like socio-economic inequality as its central concern, rather than the interests of a specific group or class. This partly reflects the fact that – as I've already noted in, again, chapter three – New Labour tended to avoid using the terminology of class while in office;¹²³ it also, at a deeper level, reflects the use of a distinction made between equal opportunity and substantive equality in which the latter is associated with an out-of-date Left. I look first at this distinction as well as the broader ideological context for the rise of social exclusion as a policy agenda. I then go on to look more closely at the way in which social exclusion is identified and how it is to be remedied, before, in the final section of the chapter, looking at the relationship between the social exclusion agenda and the equality and

¹²³ James Avis (2011: 84) points out that this did change somewhat in 2009 when the term reappeared in government publications. As I said in the previous chapter, renewed attention more generally was paid to issues of class and economic inequality towards the end of Labour's period in office.

diversity agenda. More precisely, I want to consider the important place that racial equality – usually associated with the latter – comes to occupy in the former. One report on how to reduce high levels of unemployment in certain areas – which I will look at in some detail – provides a particularly good example of this relationship in the context of concrete policy formulation, and allows a more detailed look at the distinction that I have drawn in this thesis between socio-economic and identity-based inequality.

7.1 The Decline of Class Struggle

As I've said, the TUC is the main confederation of trade unions in Britain. Founded in 1868, it describes itself as the 'voice of Britain at work' with, according to its website, 54 affiliated unions that represent just over six million workers between them. It seeks to secure not just a 'fair deal at work', but also 'social justice at home and abroad'. Given this, as well as its historic links with social democratic ideology and the Labour party, it is perhaps not surprising that equality features heavily in its work. It is one of seven topics featured on their website (alongside: 'Economic Issues', 'Workplace Issues', 'International Issues' and so on) with a large amount of information available on the subject (TUC, 2012).

There is also a vast non-electronic literature available in the shape of reports, newsletters, leaflets and so on – certainly more than the other organisations I am looking at (with the possible exception of the New Labour government). This is mainly due to the nature of the TUC as a large umbrella organisation: its size and resources enable it to cover a huge number and variety of equality-related themes: domestic violence, recession reports, workers with mental health problems, monitoring sexuality in the workplace, combating the far right, racism at work, the gender pay gap, to name only a few. Also, while my other case study organisations are generally smaller, with a single, more consistent authorial voice, different perspectives are readily available in the TUC literature. Particularly relevant here are the separate groupings of workers organised in relation to the equality 'strands' (the different grounds of inequality): there are annual conferences for LGBT, disabled, black and female workers, along with

regular newsletters devoted to these areas. The fact that these different groups have been recognised, and have a strong presence within the TUC, suggests that the size of the literature on equality is also testament to the significant influence the idea of equality and diversity has had on the organisation.

As has already been shown however, the meaning of equality has changed significantly over time. As with my study of the Fawcett Society, I paid particular attention within the TUC literature to these changes and it's no surprise to see similarities in both organisations. So, for example, when issues of race and gender inequality are dealt with in earlier texts we see the same importance attached to class in understanding and dealing with that inequality. In particular we can see that the idea of class struggle or class conflict has a central role.

An example of this in the TUC texts is the portrayal of both racial and gender inequality as a divide-and-rule tactic employed against workers by both the government and employers. For instance, in a debate on equal pay for women at the 1969 TUC conference of women workers, one speaker argues that

While the policy [the government of the day's Prices and Incomes policy] does not actually prohibit the abolition of cheap female rates, it implies that the achievement of equal pay must be within the ceiling for the industry. I think the majority of delegates here are well aware that this is one of the subtlest "divide and conquer" tactics that has been used against the working class for many a year...If it persists in its despicable efforts to divide the workers on this issue by saying that equal pay for women must come out of the pockets of their male colleagues, then the Government is implying that the men do not earn their wages but they have been subsidised by the women. There is a very impolite term for men who live on the earnings of women. Is this what the Government is now calling our male trade union colleagues? (TUC, 1969: 50)

In an educational workbook on racism published in 1983 there is a similar understanding of racial inequality: '[r]acist attitudes among trade unionists serve to...switch the blame for economic problems from policies of governments and employers to fellow workers' as well as 'weaken union organisation at the workplace through divide and rule' (TUC, 1983: 16). In both passages the idea of divide and rule ensures that gender and racial inequality, on the one hand,

and class conflict, on the other, are closely related phenomena: the former has a strategic role within the latter, enabling employers and the government to gain the upper hand.

We also find in the earlier TUC texts the signs of a struggle over who will best represent the interests of the groups facing non-class inequalities: the trade unions on the one side, or employers and the government on the other. So, for example, we find arguments like this made by the then chairman of the TUC:

This [is] one of the differences between the Government's incomes policy and the incomes policy of the Trades Union Congress. The Trades Union Congress gives priority to the claims of women, the Government does not. Not only that, there is some evidence to show that in the application of incomes policy the Government has one minimum standard for low-paid men and another minimum standard for low-paid women. It is within my own experience that women earning about £9 a week are not classified as low-paid workers. This certainly does not convince the trade union Movement that the Government is supersensitive to the considerable industrial disadvantage of working women (TUC, 1969: 43).

Again, the 1983 workbook on racism contains similar sentiments: '[w]e cannot rely on government or employers to help achieve equality for black people'; the 'background to these problems [of inequality faced by black people] lies in Britain's colonial past and the willingness of governments and employers to see black workers as a source of cheap labour' (TUC, 1983: 1). Two pages later: '[i]f members' racist views are ignored by the union, when it comes to opposing cuts in services, jobs or closures, workers will be divided. Members are likely to blame each other for the difficulties they face rather than those responsible – government and employers' (ibid: 3). Those that are responsible for racial inequality, so the argument goes, cannot be relied upon to help solve the problem.

In later texts the idea of a clash of interests between workers and opponents is much harder to find, while the idea of a mutually beneficial partnership between the different agents is more visible. In relation to non-class inequalities this is reflected in a shift towards portraying the goal of equality for various groups as the outcome of a cooperative venture with government and business rather than

an aspect of the struggle between the TUC and their opponents. In a response to a government consultation on tackling race inequality, for example, it is stated that the TUC 'believes that trade unions are an important social partner in tackling discrimination in relation to access to work and in the workplace' (TUC, 2009a: 8), and later on concern is expressed that the government document in question

makes no mention of the important role that trade unions play in tackling race discrimination in the workplace. Our response to this consultation demonstrates the involvement and commitment of the trade union movement to working with Government as a major social partner in tackling problems of race discrimination in the labour market and wider society (ibid: 16).

Even where the context of wider social and economic inequalities is alluded to in the later texts the idea of an antagonistic relationship, of social conflict, tends to be missing. For example, in response to the question 'Why tackle racism?' the TUC argue, in a later workbook on the issue published in 2000, that in a society 'which continues to have social and economic winners and losers, it is important to avoid approaches which lead to polarisation around racial identity, gender, skills or language as this helps to divide workers... Racism saps the strength of union organisation, which needs unity to defend and improve jobs and conditions' (TUC, 2000: 9). So while in the earlier workbook the TUC had written that racism helped to 'switch the blame for economic problems from policies of governments and employers to fellow workers' here it is a, more neutral-sounding, 'society which continues to have social and economic winners and losers' that provides the context for racism.

Of course, care must be taken not to draw too strong a conclusion without a more comprehensive study of the texts.¹²⁴ It would no doubt be oversimplifying matters to contrast a militant, oppositional TUC in previous years with a completely tamed force in the present. There is, for instance, the glimpse of a more assertive stance in a 2008 regional survey of equality within trade unions.

¹²⁴ It should also be kept in mind that I am comparing texts with different speakers, goals and intended audiences – the language of an official response to a government consultation, for example, may vary with that of a speaker at a conference. The workbooks on racism are useful in this regard as they allow comparisons between texts over time with these other variables largely eliminated.

In the foreword to this text Martin Gould – the president of the Southern and Eastern Regional Council of the TUC (SERTUC) – argues that:

Malcolm X once said, "Nobody can give you freedom. Nobody can give you equality and justice or anything", and he went on to say that "you (must) take it"...ultimately, we must not depend on the state, legislators, the courts, employers or HR departments to deliver equality at work and in society for us, we must secure our own agenda by force of argument, by organisation and by effective campaigning (SERTUC, 2008: 1).

The business-focused variant of diversity, diversity management, has also not been received uncritically by the TUC. We saw in chapter five that it was at the TUC's Black Workers' conference that a motion was carried opposing this trend (a point I return to in the following section). 12 years later, an emergency motion carried at the 2009 conference opposed Gordon Brown's nationalist slogan, 'British jobs for British workers', claiming it has 'no place in the trade union movement' and that it 'aids employers in dividing workers' (TUC, 2009b: 3). Here we see something of the 'divide and rule' argument that featured more prominently in earlier TUC texts.

Despite the caution needed a clear change of tone is nonetheless noticeable, a shift that, as I've said, is unsurprising given the historical context of the decline of trade unionism from its height in the 1960s and 1970s to the present day. In their study of the changing relationship between social democratic parties and trade unions in Western Europe, Upchurch et al (2009: 96) describe the incoming New Labour government's approach to industrial relations in the changed neoliberal context, as well as the TUC's response. They note the attempt on the part of New Labour to 'encourage an ideological shift in thinking away from traditional adversarialism towards a consensus-based system of industrial relations'. This is clearly expressed in a quote taken from Tony Blair's introduction to a 1998 report, 'Fairness at Work': '[t]his White Paper is part of the Government's programme to replace the notion of conflict between employers and employees with the promotion of partnership' (ibid). Despite some concerns about the 'phraseology' used by Blair among trade union leaders, the new partnership model 'initially appealed' to the TUC. Upchurch et al argue that this reflected a 'certain strategic intent', on the part of the TUC, to 'once more be

seen as a legitimate actor both within society in general and with employers in particular' (ibid).

This shift can also be registered within social democratic thought. Ruth Levitas has provided an analysis of Will Hutton's idea of 'stakeholding' (the recognition and inclusion of the different interest groups that have a 'stake' in an economic enterprise, beyond the shareholders). After noting that his general attempt to, using Hutton's words, 'achieve some proper balance between capital and labour' is resolutely not an attempt to revive 'the failures of British corporatism', Levitas writes that

Corporatism here means formal tripartite consultation between employer organizations, trade unions and government. This rested on the assumption that trade unions existed to represent the interests of workers collectively, and that such collective interests were meaningful, real and legitimate. In stakeholding, the negotiation between the two sides of industry occurs at the level of the firm, where mandatory union representation on company boards would 'force the two sides of industry into a partnership'. But an important element in this representation is the assumption that workers have interests only as individuals, not as a collectivity, and it is these individual interests which unions exist to defend (Levitas, including quote from Hutton, 1998: 57).

The crucial difference, then, between corporatism and more recent social democratic ideas is that in the former the working class was recognised as a collective identity, and this is a critical element, of course, to any notion of conflict or struggle between different social interests.

Hutton (1995: 297) himself has explained that '[r]ather than see themselves as the embodiment of a Labour movement dedicated to the transformation of capitalism, they [trade unions] have started to redefine themselves as social partners in the management of capitalism' – they can still represent their members' interests 'but within the framework of a capitalist economy'. Does this not somewhat overplay the radicalism of the corporatist model however? Surely the point was that under corporatist arrangements a notion of class conflict, along with the collective identity on which it relies, was integrated into the 'framework of a capitalist economy'; capitalism operated through giving the

working class a 'stake' in the industrial process. In this sense, the interesting aspect of Hutton's argument would be less the rejection of a collective working-class identity in favour of the capitalist framework, than the fact that they are no longer deemed compatible – there is no possibility of adjusting the way in which that framework is reproduced such that *collective* working class interests can be legitimately expressed within it. What we can add to this analysis is the process described in the previous two chapters: the rise of diversity can be understood as a similar attempt to combine the recognition of group inequality with the 'framework of a capitalist economy'. The difference, of course, is that the group recognised in this case is the non-class 'minorities' of equality and diversity (e.g. women, ethnic minorities, gay people and so on).

7.2 The Rise of Diversity

As with the Fawcett discourse, the 1980s is when we see the first calls for group-based equality policies, such as positive action, in order to accelerate the progress of equality. For example, a leaflet of 1982 on positive action states that the TUC Congress two years earlier

carried a composite resolution which noted with concern that very little progress had been made towards equality for women at work and that there was a need for new strategies to establish genuine equality of opportunity...Expectations that employment for women would be on the same basis as for men were fuelled by the enactment of the Equal Pay Act in 1970 and the Sex Discrimination Act in 1975 which were designed to achieve equality in pay and conditions, recruitment and promotion at work, and in society generally. However, while some progress has been made, it has not kept pace with these expectations and, in some areas, there are signs that the improvements which the legislation originally triggered off have been reversed (TUC, 1982: 2).

Towards the end of the same decade, we see similar concerns expressed about the lack of progress in another workbook on racism published in 1988. Under the heading 'Getting worse' it is argued that the

employment position of black workers remains as bad and in some cases worse than when the first Race Relations Act was passed over twenty years ago. This is the conclusion of a report published in March 1988 by the Runnymede Trust. The report focuses on the failure to implement positive action policies in both the public and private sectors. Employers are not doing enough to train black workers and provide new job opportunities (TUC, 1988: 30).

In both passages we find the recognition of a continuing, stubborn, possibly worsening inequality, requiring new positive action measures to help combat it.

Again, as with the Fawcett texts, the idea of diversity appears after these concerns about the pace of change and the need to accelerate progress. According to my findings, the term appears earlier in the TUC discourse though: having scanned the Black Workers' conference motions for use of the term from 1993 to 2002, 'diversity' first appears in 1995 when it is mentioned twice. There is also a peak in its use in 2000 with six mentions. In this context it is worth recalling the Schneider-Ross survey of organisations, mentioned in chapter five, that found that overall 48% of respondents had established equality and diversity as a business priority from 1997 onwards. In the same period, Erik Bleich (2003: 6-7) names 1997 as an 'especially pivotal year' in terms of European Union anti-racist activity, and in Britain 1999 sees the report of the Stephen Lawrence enquiry and, according to the Parekh Report (CFMEB, 2000: 82), the point at which New Labour's initial colour-blind approach to social exclusion policy began to shift to a more race-conscious strategy (more on this below). Also, the Parekh Report – itself an important moment in the development of equality and diversity – was published the following year. The period between 1997 and 2000 is clearly key, then, in the rise of equality and diversity.

Certainly by the time we get to the 2000s the term has become a central component of the TUC's equality discourse. For example, a report published in 2002 on gay and lesbian rights argues that

good employers now understand that equal treatment and the recognition of the diversity of our community, are not threats to business. Rather it is the case that fairness and justice at work, and policies that recognise and reflect the diversity of

the workforce and of the wider community are necessary to the success of any modern, progressive organisation. Organisations that fail to recruit, retain and promote the most talented people, regardless of the communities from which they come, are increasingly putting themselves at a serious disadvantage. To achieve a diverse workforce, to attract applications from an increasingly discerning workforce in a tight labour market, employers need actively to tackle discrimination.

The policies reported here are the result of trade unions taking forward the interests of all their members, and of far-sighted organisations understanding that diversity is a strength, not a threat (TUC, 2002: 4).

In a more recent report the TUC (2009c: 5) writes that the 'aim of unions, employers and government is to achieve a diverse and productive workforce reflecting the complex strands in today's society'. We also saw in chapter five that the TUC co-produced *Talent not Tokenism* with the CBI – a text that lays out the business case for diversity. In all three examples, then, we see not only the presence of diversity in the TUC discourse, but also the influence of the diversity management variant of equality and diversity.

Perhaps the best demonstration of the arrival of diversity comes through comparing the earlier workbooks on racism produced in 1983 and 1988 with the later one published in 2000, in the wake of the Stephen Lawrence inquiry. We can see, for example, that while the term is more or less absent from the earlier workbooks,¹²⁵ the very first aim of the later workbook is to 'show the positive contribution of *diverse* racial groups' (TUC, 2000: 5 – my emphasis).¹²⁶ There is also an entire chapter entitled 'All Different – All Equal'. Even more clearly, the arrival of diversity is demonstrated by the difference between two otherwise identical sentences: in 1983 and 1988 the TUC (1983: 3, 1988: 6) state that '[r]acism breeds on views which play-up the differences between workers' (exactly the same wording is used in each book); compare this with the 2000

¹²⁵ The closest to a mention of diversity that I can find is a 'talking point' in the 1983 book that asks '[d]o your children get a chance at school to question racist views and tackle topics in a multi-cultural way?' (TUC, 1983: 10).

¹²⁶ The other three are: to 'raise awareness of how trade unions are helping to root out racism in the workplace', to 'give step by step help to union representatives and others to turn well-intended policies into meaningful action', and to 'encourage and inspire to help challenge and integrate equality principles into day to day activities and processes'. The last of these can also be seen to be influenced by diversity and the idea of integration or mainstreaming – as outlined in the previous two chapters.

workbook where it is written that: '[r]acism thrives on views which play up the differences between *cultures and nationalities*' (TUC, 2000: 9 – my emphasis). 'Workers' as a group that racism divides has been replaced, then, with a number of different cultures. In 1983 and 1988 the following sentence is: '[d]ifferences in skin colour or beliefs are used to justify discrimination'. In the later workbook the following sentence is: '[m]yths and misinformation give negative and inaccurate views about people's beliefs and their way of life'. In the earlier discourse racism uses differences in beliefs to justify discrimination; in the later discourse the problem is the miscommunication between people defined by these different beliefs.

More than in any of my other case study organisations, however, there is evidence that the passage of diversity to its current position of prominence in the TUC discourse has not been an entirely smooth one. We have already seen in chapter five the motion carried in the 1997 Black Workers' conference opposing the 'increasing trend' that seeks to 'replace existing equal opportunity policies and procedures with those titled managing diversity or mainstreaming'. The SERTUC President, Martin Gould, similarly cautions that

since our previous survey [2004], what was once almost universally called 'equalities' has evolved into 'equalities', 'diversity' and inclusion', which are not all the same thing. Where the new vocabulary denotes new best practice, unions are firm advocates of it. But the substitution of 'equalities' by 'diversity' can conceal a dilution of values and objectives, which unions will remain sensitive and alert to (SERTUC, 2008: 1).

This point has also been made in research carried out by Greene et al (2005: 187). In their comparative study of the reception of diversity management among unions in the UK and Denmark, the authors record that British trade unionists 'consistently revealed scepticism or even outright hostility' towards diversity management – a level of opposition not found among their Danish counterparts. Diversity management, for British activists, is 'typically perceived as a purely managerialist intervention, in contrast to equal opportunities which include a "grass-roots" dimension'. In particular, the inherent individualism and focus on a business case in diversity management can be seen to be in conflict with traditional trade union values. In a TUC official's own words: there is 'a

suspicion that managing diversity is all about individuals...rather than the commonality of disadvantage that some groups can experience...The concept that we still cling to...is overcoming disadvantage and getting rid of discrimination [which] is not something that employers feel comfortable with' (ibid).¹²⁷

It is also worth highlighting evidence of tension between unions and management over the issue of diversity from the opposing perspective. A close read of Ross and Schneider's book, *From Equality to Diversity*, gives a clear idea of where unions stand in the thinking of the authors: as necessary partners in the process of change (where they are formally recognised), but with nonetheless inherent conservative tendencies that could hold progress up. The opening lines of the introduction to the book quote a trade union official from 1919, W.A. Appleton, arguing against the idea of equality between men and women. The authors then comment: 'we have come some way since 1919...*Even* the TUC...set up an Equal Rights Department, although admittedly not until 1988' (Ross and Schneider, 1992: xiii – my emphasis). Elsewhere in the book the authors comment that it 'should not be surprising' if unions are 'informally resistant' to equal opportunity policies as 'shop stewards are often the defenders of "custom and practice" and the "status quo"'.¹²⁸

Again, it is the individualism of diversity management that clearly conflicts with the trade union tradition of collective action:

Paying people in a way that reflects their contribution to the organisation is easy to say but difficult to do. Yet, it lies at the heart of the employment contract – an individual sells his or her labour in return for particular rewards – and is increasingly important as the United Kingdom moves towards a know-how economy.

Collectivisation appears to be a dying force, as even traditional manufacturing workers are embracing individual contracts, because they believe that this can

¹²⁷ In another article, Kirton and Greene also make the point that where there is an explicit use of the diversity management discourse by trade unions (which as I have shown is quite common in contemporary TUC texts) this can be a sign that a pragmatic, strategic step has been taken, rather than evidence of a complete ideological acceptance of the diversity management approach: '[w]e have accepted...that if we're going to get anywhere in talking about equality, we have to talk about the business case' (Kirton and Greene quoting a TUC official, 2004: 17).

¹²⁸ Middle managers – who practise 'passive resistance' – are also marked out as a potentially conservative block to equal opportunity policies. The answer to both cases of resistance: 'people need to be able to see how equal opportunities can help them' (Ross and Schneider, 1992: 206).

more accurately reward them for their contribution...As far as equal opportunities is concerned, this is a healthy trend. If equal opportunities is about ensuring each individual is properly rewarded (and what else can it mean?) then individual contracts must be the best way of doing this. Collective bargaining obscures differences in contribution. The outcome is not decided through any particularly logical argument but simply expresses the current state of the power balance between employers and employees. Unions have not been particularly assiduous in looking after the interests of women and minorities (Ross and Schneider, 1992: 161-2).

Compare this with the TUC discourse where there is a 'need for concerted and co-ordinated action by government and also by trade unions through collective bargaining to eliminate race and sex discrimination in the labour market and in society' (TUC, 2006: 14). For Ross and Schneider, then, we can see that collective bargaining conflicts with the principle of individual merit and the individual differences contributed by employees. Also, as suggested in the final sentence, they draw a link between trade union collectivism and an alleged lack of interest in minority issues. For the TUC, on the other hand, equal opportunity is something to be achieved *through* the practice of collective bargaining.

We can see in contemporary texts, then, evidence of a struggle over who will best represent the interests of minority groups that, as we saw above, was a feature of the older TUC texts. The question I want to raise in the rest of this section is the precise change that diversity brings about in relation to this tension. More specifically, are the signs of conflict that we see in the later texts over the idea of diversity itself, or rather the particular way in which that term is used in the diversity management discourse? In other words, is diversity flexible enough to be rearticulated within a class-focused discourse, or is the dominant neoliberal version of the concept the only one available? There are two points to make here that relate to this issue and, in particular, the question of identity.

First of all, take the quote from the trade union official cited above: there is 'a suspicion that managing diversity is all about individuals...rather than the commonality of disadvantage that *some groups* can experience' (quoted in Greene et al, 2005: 187 – my emphasis). What groups are the TUC talking about here? It is probably most common for criticism of the individualism of

diversity management to be made from the point of view of those politicised group identities generally associated with equality and diversity (in particular, women and ethnic minorities). What about 'workers' as a collective category though? This is an identity that is clearly visible in older TUC texts (and, indeed, in older Fawcett texts – as we saw in chapter four), but which, as I've argued, tends to disappear in contemporary equality discourse. As is to be expected, along with the decline of class struggle in the later texts there is also an observable lack of reference to a working class identity. However, while this decline of class may accompany the rise of diversity, it is not necessarily an *effect* of diversity.

Another way of looking at the question would be to ask if there is textual evidence that suggests that it would be possible to combine the idea of diversity with the promotion of a working class identity. A motion carried by the SERTUC Regional Council in October 2006 suggests that this may be possible, at least in discursive terms:

Our combined regions are the most ethnically, culturally and socially diverse in the United Kingdom. We believe that racism and fascism will only divide worker from worker using our diversity as a weapon to attack us. On the other hand, we believe our diversity is a strength and a cause for celebration (Unionlearn, 2007: 38).

One argument against the possibility of combining diversity with a working class identity would be that diversity makes *any* cohesive identity impossible. However, there is an interplay within the texts not only between diversity and equality, but also diversity and cohesion (in the sense of a cohesive identity that contains diversity). While we see the attempt to combine cohesion with diversity most commonly in relation to a *national* identity (a project I will explore in detail in the following chapter), what the above quote suggests is that it may be possible to combine diversity with a cohesive *class* identity.

The second point follows on from the first: it is possible to find an articulation of diversity with a working-class identity in discourses that stand much further to the left of the TUC in terms of a clear rejection of neoliberalism. For example, in his recent book on class, which argues that the working-class has been systematically 'demonized' and neglected as a key accompaniment to the

growing inequality in society over the last few decades, Owen Jones (2011: 101-3) claims that the pursuit of multiculturalism, in the context of the neoliberal abandonment of class politics, has meant that disadvantaged identities are constructed solely along ethnic rather than class lines. Echoing the analysis of the Runnymede publication that we saw in chapter four, he criticises the Labour party's response to the growing concerns about immigration in working-class communities in recent years: '[r]ather than focusing on the *economic* ills shared by the working class of all creeds and colours, New Labour redefined them as *cultural* problems affecting the *white* working class. The white working class became one marginalized ethnic minority among others' (ibid: 103). However, this analysis is combined by Jones with a defence of multiculturalism and the idea of diversity at its heart: '[w]e are rightly encouraged to embrace and celebrate ethnic minority identity, not least as a counterweight to continued entrenched racism' (ibid: 102).

Perhaps surprisingly given his earlier critique of multiculturalism, Sivanandan (in an interview given in 2006 with the Socialist Workers Party's newspaper) similarly seeks to defend the idea of diversity. He acknowledges the 'weaknesses in what multiculturalism became', distinguishing between 'multiculturalism' and 'ethnicism', with the latter defined as a focus on the cultural divisions between disadvantaged ethnic minority communities rather than what they had in common (this is the focus of his critique that I cited in chapter three). Nonetheless multiculturalism, according to Sivanandan, should be defended from its right wing, neoliberal critics: '[t]oday the forces of globalisation are attempting to culturally flatten us and force us all to adopt a single culture – that of the free market. Multiculturalism is a barrier to this process because it legitimises the idea of diversity'. This analysis coincides with the job of the left to build a 'new working class movement, one that involves all those who have only recently arrived on these shores' (Socialist Worker Online, 2006).

My purpose here is neither to defend nor criticise this ideological move, but simply to show that it is a possibility. In other words, it seems that what I have called the equality and diversity framework can be detached from the neoliberal ideology with which it is most associated and reattached to a class-based

ideology. If with the TUC it might be difficult to distinguish their acceptance of diversity from their attempt to be a social partner with employers and government, this is clearly not the case with those explicitly anti-neoliberal discourses that also accept the idea of diversity. What this suggests, then, is that any answer to the question posed above (of the precise relationship between the decline of class and the rise of diversity) has to take into account the flexible nature of the equality and diversity framework and its combination with different political ideologies.

7.3 Social Exclusion and Inequality

While we can trace the effects of neoliberalism on the TUC discourse, allowing a useful comparison of texts before and after the neoliberal transformation of British society, the New Labour government's social exclusion agenda is a relatively recent innovation in public policy. The agenda became a central part of the New Labour project with the establishment in 1997 of the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) – an inter-departmental body that, as with the Women and Equality Unit (WEU), would work across government departments to 'develop integrated and sustainable approaches to the problems of the worst housing estates, including crime, drugs, unemployment, community breakdown, and bad schools' (Social Exclusion Unit report quoted by Percy-Smith, 2000: 2).¹²⁹ As with the WEU, the cross-cutting nature of the SEU makes it difficult to pick out specific departments responsible for the discourse, though it's worth noting that the unit was based at the Cabinet Office, reflecting the high priority given to its work by the government. I have also again taken only a small number of these reports. The aim – as with the other case studies more generally – is not to gain a comprehensive knowledge of this particular discourse, but rather to use it as a reference point in understanding the broader development of equality and diversity in Britain.

As a policy agenda, social exclusion is a response to the familiar problems of poverty, inequality and disadvantage. Its specificity stems from the term

¹²⁹ The work of the SEU is in relation to England only – the other countries in the UK have their own devolved arrangements.

'exclusion'. Why should the problem be understood in this way and, conversely, why is the goal 'inclusion'? Those critical of the concept, or at least the way in which the Labour Party have adopted it, often draw a contrast between exclusion and inequality, arguing that the rise of the former replaces the previous social-democratic concern with the latter. Ruth Lister, for example, describes it as an 'important paradigm shift in thinking about the welfare state'; she cites, as evidence of this, Will Hutton, a supporter of the agenda, who argues that underpinning his notion of 'stakeholding' is the idea that (in his words) social inclusion, not equality, 'should be the overriding objective for the contemporary left' (quoted in Lister, 1998: 215). Janet Newman (2001: 151-4) also describes a shift from equality to inclusion and argues that social exclusion represents an attempt to separate poverty and economic inequality from the 'politics of social rights and redistribution' (ibid: 151-2).¹³⁰ From a historical perspective, Janie Percy-Smith (2000: 1-2) – in locating the origins of the term in French social policy in the 1980s and then, more broadly, as a goal of the European Union – similarly describes the way a concern with exclusion began to replace a concern with poverty among European elites. A critic might argue, then, that a concern with exclusion is simply a way of avoiding the more substantive issues of inequality and poverty. Dealing with the 'worst housing estates' is, in this sense, simply a palliative measure that detracts attention from the injustices of mainstream society that the excluded are to be integrated into.¹³¹

The suggestion that the social exclusion agenda may detract attention from a more substantive approach to inequality brings us to another way in which equality is conceptualised in New Labour ideology. This is based on a distinction between equality of outcome and equality of opportunity, in which the former is rejected as an outmoded element of old left ideology in favour of the

¹³⁰ What Newman doesn't do – as far as I know – is highlight the link between this separation and an application of the 'politics of social rights and redistribution' to groups defined by their non-economic 'identity'. This is what I try to do in this chapter, though, as we will see, this is a complex issue.

¹³¹ Levitas (1998: 7) writes that social exclusion as a term is 'intrinsically problematic... The solution implied by a discourse of social exclusion is a minimalist one: a transition across the boundary to become an insider rather than an outsider in a society whose structural inequalities remain largely uninterrogated'.

latter (Lister, 1998: 216-7).¹³² In a debate with Roy Hattersley on this shift in Labour party thinking, Gordon Brown explained that New Labour rejected equality of outcome as 'neither desirable or feasible, imposing uniformity and stifling human potential' (Lister's words, *ibid*: 217); in contrast, equality of opportunity is favoured that would be 'recurrent, lifelong and comprehensive' (Brown quoted in *ibid*). If the idea of social exclusion in some sense implies an acceptance of historically high levels of inequality – as critics have suggested – we can see why the opportunity versus outcome distinction may be a useful one in helping to legitimise social exclusion as a policy agenda. By attempting to shift the meaning of equality towards a focus on opportunities, rather than the actual distribution of resources, the argument can be made that social exclusion does not replace the goal of equality but rather is partnered with a more sophisticated version of the idea – a version that allows 'human potential' full reign through enabling equal opportunity rather than stifling that potential in favour of crude social engineering.

The aim so far has to been to place the social exclusion agenda within the broader context of New Labour ideology; I will now consider the social exclusion discourse itself in more detail. In particular, what constitutes social exclusion? How, in other words, is it to be identified in society?

In answer to this question, a commonly used metaphor within the discourse is that of a 'cycle'. The term is understood in two ways. On the one hand it refers to a cycle in people's lives in which various problems accumulate:

Social exclusion is about more than income poverty. It is a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas face a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, discrimination, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown. These problems are linked and mutually reinforcing so that they can create a vicious cycle in people's lives (SEU, 2004: 3).

In other words social exclusion describes a process in which different problems begin to accumulate in people's lives and reinforce one another, thereby gaining

¹³² These two conceptualisations of equality in New Labour ideology – the distinction between social inclusion and exclusion and that between equality of outcome and opportunity – are taken from Callinicos (2000: 38-41).

a significance that taken on their own they may have lacked. The idea of a 'vicious cycle' suggests that this process serves to trap people, excluding them from the opportunities that exist in mainstream society. Two particular points in this passage should be highlighted here – both of which I will return to below: 1) the space in which these problems accumulate is understood not only in relation to individual lives but also geographical areas; 2) as the passage makes clear, the problems that accumulate are not only economic ones in the sense of a lack of wealth or resources – in particular, discrimination is included in the list.

The second meaning of 'cycle' refers to what the same report calls the 'intergenerational transmission of social exclusion' (ibid: 11): '[p]overty and social exclusion can also pass from one generation to the next. For example, experiencing poverty in childhood and having parents who did not gain qualifications at school or college are powerful influences on a child's life, often continuing to affect their life chances as they get older' (ibid: 3). Here the cyclical effect of disadvantage refers to the way in which a child born into a family affected by social exclusion is then more likely to be themselves socially excluded, who then, in turn, will pass this disadvantage on to their children, and so on. As an earlier report puts it:

The key to tackling disadvantage in the future is the eradication of child poverty. Children who grow up in disadvantaged families generally do less well at school, and are more likely to suffer unemployment, low pay and poor health in adulthood. This poverty of opportunity is then more likely to be experienced by the next generation of children. Breaking this cycle is at the heart of our strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion. That is why the Prime Minister has made it our aim to create a fairer society, within the next two decades, in which no child lives in poverty. We need to break the cycle of deprivation, to stop it being transmitted through generations (Department of Social Security, 1999: 5).

We can see, then, that a 'cycle' names a qualitative transformation of inequality from something that occurs naturally, as a result of freeing human potential and creativity, to an unnatural blockage that reproduces itself in individual lives, geographical areas or across generations. It marks the point where the formal equality promised by the system – the opportunity everybody has to succeed regardless of the social conditions from which they originate – fails to occur. In

other words, as long as people in your area or different generations in your family are able to do well inequalities can be justified. It is only if this inequality begins to take on a clear pattern in one of these dimensions (i.e. geographically or generationally) that we might then have a case of unjustifiable disadvantage that needs to be targeted.

7.4 Social Exclusion and Diversity

What does all this have to do with equality and diversity? The latter could be said to represent a third way in which equality is understood in New Labour ideology (alongside the inclusion/exclusion and opportunity/outcome distinction). How these different understandings of the idea interact is the question I want to consider in the rest of this chapter. As mentioned above, the Parekh Report records a relatively early shift in the government's position on the issue of social exclusion, departing from a 'generally colour-blind approach' only two years after New Labour first assumed power. Three government documents are cited as evidence of this, published between late 1999 and the summer of 2000, all of which deal with the issue of race equality as a specific aspect of social exclusion policy. The point the Parekh Report makes, in arguing strongly in favour of this shift, is not simply that, as has already been mentioned, discrimination should be recognised as one of the problems that may combine to produce social exclusion, or, in a related sense, that disproportionate numbers of the socially excluded are from disadvantaged identity-based groups. Rather, from the report's point of view, it should be explicitly recognised that achieving the aims of social exclusion will not necessarily help to remove identity-based disadvantage if the 'colour-blind approach' is not transcended. In other words, a colour-blind approach to social exclusion makes it possible for the 'specific objectives [of the social exclusion agenda] to be achieved but for inequalities between Asian, black and Irish people and the rest of the population to widen' (CFMEB, 2000: 82).

The question raised here concerns the, for want of a better term, 'vantage point' from which the overlap between social exclusion and ethnicity is seen. The 'colour-blind' perspective criticised by the Parekh Report is that which sees high

numbers of ethnic minority people among the socially excluded as a product of the same dynamic that produces social exclusion more generally, so that race equality will be dealt with simply through reducing social exclusion.¹³³ The opposing, 'colour-conscious', perspective is to see high numbers of socially excluded ethnic minority people as a product of ethnic disadvantage – disadvantage that affects all in the ethnic group, including the many that are not socially excluded. As it is put by one of the three government documents cited by the Parekh Report:

Minority ethnic social exclusion is complex and varies according to the economic, social, cultural and religious backgrounds of the particular people concerned. This complexity is not always understood or appreciated, partly because there is limited data available about different minority ethnic groups. But there is sufficient data to demonstrate that people from minority ethnic communities disproportionately experience various aspects of social exclusion...This chapter...deliberately focuses on problems faced by minority ethnic communities, but it should be borne in mind that many people from minority ethnic communities experience few, if any, of these problems (SEU, 2000: 17).

Similarly, from an earlier report: '[e]thnic minority disadvantage cuts across all aspects of deprivation. *Taken as a whole*, ethnic minority groups are more likely than the rest of the population to live in poor areas, be unemployed, have low incomes, live in poor housing, have poor health, and be the victims of crime' (SEU, 1998: 30 – my emphasis). It is this shift of perspective, from which the same phenomenon (in this case, the overlap between exclusion and ethnicity) is viewed, that is critical to the rise of equality and diversity. It is this which enables the counter-argument to those critics of multiculturalism who argue that multiculturalism assumes that all members of ethnic minority groups are disadvantaged (and that conversely all members of the majority are advantaged). Rather, what multicultural policies assume is simply that '*taken as a whole*' minority groups are disadvantaged.

We get a good view of how this idea (the 'colour-conscious' perspective) is incorporated into the functioning of the social exclusion discourse if we consider another of the three documents mentioned by the Parekh Report: *Jobs for All*:

¹³³ See Brian Barry's (2001b: 52-3) discussion of this issue in his critique of the Parekh Report.

National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal. In her foreword Tessa Jowell, the minister of what was then the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE), states that the report

has been considering how best to ensure that the delivery of Government labour market policies helps jobless people in deprived neighbourhoods and from ethnic minority backgrounds into work.

The Government is taking forward the most ambitious programme of labour market reform we have seen to enable people to move from welfare into work – a programme which the PAT¹³⁴ endorses. But in doing this, which will have benefits across the labour market, we must not ignore the inequalities that currently exist. People from ethnic minority backgrounds and people in deprived neighbourhoods have much less good chances in the labour market than the rest of the population. They have lower rates of employment and higher rates of unemployment. This is unacceptable (DfEE, 1999: ii).

In response to this problem, the remit of the report is to: 'reduce the difference between levels of worklessness in poor neighbourhoods and the national average', and 'within that to reduce the disproportionate unemployment rates for people from ethnic minorities' (ibid: 7).

The second chapter of the report continues in a similar vein: '[o]pportunities in the labour market are unequal. Your chances of having a job depend markedly on where you live and on your ethnic background. So do your chances of remaining unemployed if you lose your job or if you fail to get one on leaving education and training' (ibid : 14). After going on to look at the evidence for, what is termed, 'geographical' and 'racial' inequality, the report concludes:

In short, opportunities to work and prosper in our society are strongly influenced by where you live and by your ethnic origin. No one would agree to play a game with loaded dice. But, as things stand, life chances are heavily loaded for people from some areas and from some ethnic backgrounds. We must now act to change that (ibid : 20).

¹³⁴ PAT stands for Policy Action Team. 18 PAT's were set-up by the government involving personnel from different government departments as well as non-governmental experts and those with experience on the ground. The aim was to fill in the gaps in the government's overall social exclusion strategy by focusing attention on specific cross-cutting issues. The report I am looking at here is the report of the PAT on jobs.

In these passages we can see not only the incorporation of the diversity perspective in viewing unequal employment opportunities in terms of race, but also some of the other issues that I have discussed above in relation to the social exclusion discourse. For the remainder of this chapter I want to look at three particular points in more detail.

First of all, it is clear from the passages just cited that there is a recognition of inequality in dealing with the particular problem focused on in this report, together with an aim to reduce unequal *outcomes*. In other words, there is a recognition of what might be called the failure of formal equality: that the rules of the game while appearing fair, are, in fact, unfair (the dice are 'loaded'). This means, in the context of this report, that the aim is a substantive reduction of unequal rates of employment, not merely a removal of unfair barriers. Of course, this is a familiar idea in relation to equality and diversity and, as I have shown in the previous two chapters, it is one that has become increasingly accepted over the years. Here, though, we see the same idea applied to socio-economic inequality.

The second notable feature of the report is the manner in which geography acts as a way of understanding socio-economic inequality, such that the inequality of people in poor and deprived neighbourhoods is understood as 'geographical inequality'. In fact, this is quite a common feature of the equality and diversity literature more generally. Take this passage from the final report of the Equalities Review (2007: 33), for example: 'on the simple measure of income inequality, some parts of the country have fared much worse than others. Inequality and the distribution of disadvantage still show distinct geographical patterns'. Two years later, in justifying the new socio-economic duty (as discussed in the previous chapter), the government claimed that

We know that inequality does not just come from your gender or ethnicity; your sexual orientation or your disability; your age, or your religion or belief. Overarching and interwoven with these specific forms of disadvantage is the persistent inequality of social class – your family background or where you were born (Government Equalities Office, 2009a: 9).

Here it is more specifically *class*, not socio-economic inequality, that is understood in geographical terms. What is also noticeable in the latter quote is that 'family background' acts as a second way of understanding this type of inequality. This brings to mind the discussion above of how social exclusion is identified, and the two ways in which it can take a supra-individual (i.e. social) form: disadvantage can be 'transmitted' both geographically and generationally, creating 'cycles' that serve to trap people, preventing them from accessing opportunities in society. Geography, in the context of this report then, is a way in which inequalities in employment rates can be recognised as significant and tangible; it helps mark the points in society where 'natural' inequality¹³⁵ becomes unnatural and thereby the legitimate target of social policy. Understanding inequality in geographical terms also crucially differs from the way in which inequality is understood as a consequence of identity-based group membership.

This takes us to the third notable feature of the 'Jobs for All' report, where we see the incorporation of the diversity perspective discussed above: the clear distinction and separation between two types of inequality – socio-economic/geographical, on the one hand, and identity-based/racial, on the other. Interestingly, the separate nature of the two inequalities is portrayed as less an empirical finding, and more a way of structuring the research to begin with: '[a]t its first meeting the PAT agreed that it would...look separately at the causes of high unemployment in poor neighbourhoods and among people from ethnic minority backgrounds and at the best ways of reducing unemployment in both cases' (DfEE, 1999: 8). On the following page: the team 'decided that *it was important* to look separately at the reasons for the higher rates of unemployment experienced by people from ethnic minority backgrounds' (ibid: 9 – my emphasis). The report – as far as I could see – does not say what the reason was for this separation or why it was felt to be so important; it has the character of an unquestioned assumption structuring the way in which the report is carried out.

¹³⁵ 'Income inequality in itself need not be disturbing or surprising in a dynamic economy if matched by equality of opportunity to move up the economic scale' (DfEE, 1999: 22).

The report goes on to list four reasons for why 'people living in low employment/high unemployment neighbourhoods and people from ethnic minority backgrounds fail to secure the jobs that exist': firstly, the lack of skills in deprived areas, poor formal qualifications and low levels of self-confidence, commitment, self-discipline etc; secondly, the inability to match workers with employers; thirdly, the fact that many people 'regard the certainty of benefit as preferable to the potentially higher but more risky (as they see it) rewards of work'. The fourth reason specifically relates to ethnic minority people: '[n]either qualifications, nor geography explain why people from ethnic minority backgrounds do less well in the labour market' leaving discrimination as an 'explanatory factor'. This means 'employers are setting on one side employable people who could add value to their businesses because they come from ethnic minority backgrounds' (ibid: 24-28 – I have rearranged the order that these reasons appear in the text). Only the fourth cause then, relating specifically to ethnic minorities, involves unjust treatment and inequality in the form of discrimination, and it is clearly this term, discrimination, that is important in distinguishing the two types of inequality.

In relation to this issue of discrimination we see an interesting way in which the two types of inequality are not so easily distinguished in the report: according to the report *all* people from deprived neighbourhoods face discrimination not just ethnic minorities. Significantly, this is mentioned not in the fourth, but in the second cause of unemployment (as listed above): the 'lack of fully effective mechanisms for building bridges between employers and employable, but jobless, people in deprived neighbourhoods'. The report notes that the

reasons varied for these failures to link people without jobs to jobs without people...*In many cases* employers lacked confidence that people from the areas concerned would meet their needs and decided not to take the risk of recruiting from them. In effect, employers were sifting by area or "red-lining" deprived neighbourhoods (ibid: 28 – my emphasis).¹³⁶

¹³⁶ As emphasised, this type of discrimination appears here as a fairly common practice, although it should be noted that this finding is downplayed in a later chapter: '[w]e found some evidence of discrimination based on a person's post code or the particular estate on which someone lived. This was not a universal practice by employers but does occur in some areas of the country' (DfEE, 1999: 91).

We've already seen above that discrimination is one of a 'combination of linked problems' that can cause social exclusion. Here we see, though, that this discrimination is not necessarily linked to one of the 'protected characteristics', it is clearly also a feature of geographic/socio-economic inequality.

In the previous chapter we saw the Labour government's Solicitor General, Vera Baird, while defending the separation of socio-economic and identity-based inequality in the 2010 Equality Act, also acknowledge that people may be discriminated against because of their 'socio-economic status'. We also saw that for Baird, while the existence of this kind of discrimination is recognised, it is not a *cause* of the unequal situation in the way that it is for identity-based disadvantage. However, while this seems like a straightforward proposition it should be pointed out that, within the terms of the discourse that I have been describing so far (i.e. aside from the question of its *empirical* validity), this proposition leads us into far boggier ground than might at first be thought. This is because, as described in the previous chapter, the meaning of 'discrimination' has been transformed over the years. Much of what now goes under the term in relation to identity-based groups is *indirect* discrimination, and, as we saw, this means looking for the source of inequality in underlying cultures and institutions rather than in individual interactions. Conversely, while it may be obvious that discrimination is not the cause of socio-economic inequality, it should be kept in mind that what is meant by the term in this context is solely *direct* discrimination – i.e. it does not include how a group may be disadvantaged in relation to these same underlying social structures.

Furthermore, as we saw with the arrival of the public duties and the shift from discrimination to equalities legislation, the general trajectory of the law runs counter to Baird's characterisation of discrimination as the defining cause of identity-based disadvantage. Another way of putting this is that it is the focus on a more substantive, material type of inequality that defines identity-based inequality, in contrast to socio-economic inequality. Here we join up with the distinction between formal and substantive equality that has already been noted as a feature of New Labour thinking about equality (in the guise of an opposition between opportunity and outcome). If we return to the report we can see a good

example of this distinction in the different targets set for the amelioration of geographical and racial inequality respectively:

We shall never altogether eliminate the regional and local variations in rates of employment and unemployment which stem from differing patterns of employment and the differing economic impacts to which they are subject. A dynamic economy will lead to relative imbalances between regions and, within regions, between areas as industries wax and wane. At ward level, high unemployment and low employment rates may reflect a tendency for people to move out as and when they secure a job. The important thing is that the balance should not become permanently tilted against particular areas (DfEE, 1999: 32).

The report then recommends halving the percentage point differential between employment rates in deprived neighbourhoods and the national average. For racial inequality, however, the report states that in the 'case of people from ethnic minority backgrounds the PAT believes that our national aspiration can be straightforwardly stated: it should be to eliminate inequalities in employment and unemployment rates between people from ethnic backgrounds and the rest of the population' (ibid: 34-35). We can see then that for geographical inequality, differences in employment rates are only a problem, an inequality to be remedied, when these differences become concretised in particular areas – when the natural dynamism of the economy fails, and relative imbalances become permanent imbalances. This contrasts sharply with racial inequality where *any* difference in employment rates is understood as a problematic inequality to be eliminated.¹³⁷

7.5 Conclusion

These three features of 'Jobs for All' – the recognition of inequality and the need to adjust outcomes in order to produce formal equality, the understanding of this inequality in geographical terms, and the distinction drawn between geographical and racial inequality – all reflect the broader themes that can be

¹³⁷ It should be pointed out that differences of age, qualifications and geographical residence are taken into account. The goal, properly stated, is that 'people from ethnic minority backgrounds should be as likely to be employed and as unlikely to be unemployed as the rest of the local population with the same level of qualification and of the same age' (DfEE, 1999: 35).

found in the social exclusion discourse in the context of a concrete policy problem. What is particularly useful to find, in relation to the argument running throughout this thesis, is a more detailed look at the discursive separation of socio-economic and identity-based inequality that accompanies the increasing presence of equality and diversity issues within the social exclusion agenda. What we can see is that the separation has less to do with the particular problems faced by those who are unequal (socio-economic inequality includes discrimination, identity-based inequality includes poverty), and more to do with a difference in the outcomes sought: complete group equality in response to identity-based inequality, reduced inequality in response to socio-economic inequality.

There is another way of putting this that focuses on the relationship between inequality and group identity – an issue that also lies at the heart of the changing nature of the TUC discourse. Both types of inequality have, at source, the same fundamental problem: the failure of formal equality to guarantee individuals opportunities in society. Where they differ, however, is how to respond to this problem: socio-economic inequality focuses attention on how to *prevent* inequality from gaining a social presence. In other words, the central challenge is how to stop the 'transmission' of disadvantage between individuals (as it is put in the social exclusion discourse) such that inequality becomes embedded in particular localities or passed on from parent to child. In policy terms, as we have seen, this means interrupting generational and geographical cycles through, for example, child poverty initiatives and sure start centres on the one hand, and area-based regeneration schemes on the other. In relation to unemployment levels in *Jobs for All*, we have seen that halving the differences between areas was deemed to be the quantitative reduction necessary to prevent this transmission from taking place. To respond to identity-based inequality, in contrast, means to recognise the social reality of inequality as 'manifested' (to use a term of Baird's) in particular groups, and then seek to equalise the position of that group in society by bringing it up to the level of a comparatively advantaged group. In the report just analysed the aim is complete equality in employment rates between ethnic minorities and the majority.

In contrast, what we find in earlier TUC texts is a response to inequality that differs from both of these options. Like the examples from the Fawcett texts cited in chapter four, the working class is a recognised identity requiring something of the substantive, group-based gains that we find promoted in contemporary equality and diversity discourse. However it has an identity rooted in the economy rather than the various 'protected characteristics' of race, gender, sexuality etc, and this serves to prevent class from being properly included in the equality and diversity agenda.¹³⁸ We also found that this earlier centrality of class inequality meant that non-class inequalities, while clearly recognised and important in older texts, tended to be placed in the context of a more fundamental class conflict such that racism and sexism, for example, were commonly seen as forms of divide and rule. It is this specific class identity that is largely missing from later texts and that, as we saw, coincides with the rise of diversity to a currently prominent place within the TUC discourse.

¹³⁸ I will revisit this issue in the final chapter in order to explain in more detail why class gets excluded from the socio-economic/identity distinction. In particular I do not believe that, in the final analysis, this distinction overlaps quite as neatly with the equality of opportunity/outcome distinction as it may seem.

Chapter Eight: Conflict and Cohesion

So far I have been principally concerned with the rise of equality and diversity – the way in which, in particular, the concept of diversity has gained an increasingly prominent place, in a variety of institutional contexts, as a value to be recognised alongside equality. We have also seen the important role played by conflict in this process: in chapter three we saw how the origins of multiculturalism lie in the response by local governments to the civil disorder of the first half of the 1980s; we also saw in chapter five how the idea of diversity emerged as a new way of promoting equal opportunity policies, in response to the controversy surrounding them in the second half of the 1980s. In this chapter my concern is also with conflict, but here the problem appears at a later stage in the development of the framework. More specifically, I want to look in detail at the way in which, in response to the problem of conflict, a third value is emphasised in the literature, cohesion, to be pursued alongside equality and diversity.

To make this clearer it is helpful if we turn to the two case studies that I will use to explore this topic. Both discourses originate in the early 2000s and both are, in different ways, products of the successful institutionalisation of equality and diversity that I have described in the previous chapters. The EDF (Equality and Diversity Forum)¹³⁹ is an NGO that is unique, as far as I know, in having been established as a way of giving a single voice to the disparate groups and organisations campaigning for the different types of inequality increasingly recognised in law. As we will see from an analysis of the EDF discourse in the first two sections of this chapter, this expansion of strands (types of inequality) brings with it the danger of conflict as the different interest-groups recognised grow in number and confidence in making identity-based claims. What is particularly interesting about the EDF is the mediating role it attempts to play in dealing with some of the issues that arise from this – a role that clearly springs from the organisation's claim to represent the equality and diversity agenda as a whole. I will look first at the role of human rights in the EDF's response to the

¹³⁹ I should add that I am a former employee of the organisation.

problem of conflict; in the second section I will look at some of the non-legal, policy-based solutions suggested by the organisation.

In the third and fourth sections of the chapter I will look at the New Labour government's community cohesion discourse, which developed as a response to civil disturbances that took place in 2001. As the government saw it, these disturbances were, at least in part, caused by the widespread promotion of equality and diversity without an accompanying stress on the common values that help bind different communities together. It is the attempt to correct this that I will explore first, focusing on the attempt to advance an inclusive British identity and sense of citizenship that would unite disparate communities, while still respecting cultural diversity. While it is probably fair to say that this project is what the community cohesion discourse is best known for, we can also see in the discourse not just the need to combine unity and diversity but also the need to combine unity and equality. In other words, there is a clearly articulated need to rethink the way in which equality policies are carried out on the ground, including the social exclusion policies that I looked at in the previous chapter. I will focus on this aspect of community cohesion in the final section of this chapter.

8.1 Conflict and Human Rights

To begin with I want to say a little more about the EDF as an organisation. It describes itself as a 'network of national organisations committed to equal opportunities, social justice, good community relations, respect for human rights and an end to discrimination based on age, disability, gender and gender identity, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation' (EDF, 2012a). It also has three more-specific objectives: 1) to promote equality and eliminate discrimination on the grounds or 'strands' just mentioned (i.e. age, disability etc); 2) promote human rights; 3) to 'promote for the public benefit the efficiency and effectiveness of Voluntary Sector Providers' who work in the different areas of equality (EDF, 2012b).

The EDF was first formed in January 2002 and has grown steadily since then. In the 2008-09 Annual Report Sarah Spencer, former chair of the organisation, describes how she and the secretary of EDF, Patrick Grattan, initially 'organised a meeting of organisations across the equality spectrum, to see what we had in common', in a context in which 'these organisations had little or no contact with each other and limited understanding of each other's agendas' (EDF, 2009a: 3). She continues:

Few of us would ever have imagined that this first meeting would lead to the birth of the influential network that is the EDF. Our aim – to develop the dialogue and trust that are needed to enable equality and human rights organisations to work together towards common goals – has not changed but our activities have expanded beyond all recognition, testament to the immense value that equality and human rights organisations experience in practice from working together (ibid).

It currently has 31 member organisations – all of them national NGOs – who meet regularly to discuss on-going developments in the equality and diversity field.¹⁴⁰ EDF activities include (alongside these regular monthly meetings): issuing joint responses to government reports and consultations, organising conferences and commissioning research on specific equality and diversity topics, and producing a fortnightly email newsletter circulated to all with an interest in the latest equality and diversity news. As an organisation in its own right, the EDF is also probably the smallest of my case studies, with only four members of staff. The amount of material produced is correspondingly small and – along with the joint statements mentioned, which are written by the EDF staff but involve gaining a consensus from member organisations – include specially commissioned research pieces on various topics and seminar reports with accompanying papers and presentations by various speakers.

Turning now to the texts themselves, the first, most obvious, distinguishing feature of the EDF discourse relates to, what could be called, the management of the strands (the six grounds of discrimination mentioned at the beginning of this section). In other words, in order for the EDF to speak as an overarching equalities organisation, it is necessary to maintain a certain minimal coherence

¹⁴⁰ There are also 67 'observers': organisations that are present at EDF meetings but are not represented by the forum as a collective voice – including government departments.

among the different inequalities that their members campaign against. As with the EHRC there is, in order to do this, an emphasis laid on both the fundamental equality between the strands and the importance of ensuring that the specific nature of each strand is not lost:

It is our view that the scope for addressing issues across the six strands is one of the strongest arguments for moving towards a single equality approach...While each strand has certain issues which are unique and need to be addressed separately, much of the diversity agenda is common across the various strands and should be dealt with "in the round"...In the Forum we have found that the various groups mutually reinforce rather than compete with each other (EDF, 2003: 2).

In the context of this balance to be struck between equality and diversity there is also a clearly identified danger: that the recognised differences between equality grounds will become artificial separations – or, a term often used, 'silos'. This is of particular concern for the EDF because, as I have said, its very existence as an organisation depends on a unified equality and diversity field that it can then represent.

We find in later texts an emphasis not just on preventing 'silos', but also preventing conflict between the different strands. This is potentially a more serious issue. While a concern that accompanied the initial meetings which founded the organisation,¹⁴¹ it is also one that – I think it's fair to say – becomes more prominent in the EDF discourse over time. In the Annual Report for 2008-09, for example, the EDF make this issue – what they call 'competing rights' – one of two priorities for the year:¹⁴²

As equality law covers new grounds, the potential for tensions between different areas of rights has increased. Gender, sexual orientation and religion or belief are often cited as arenas of possible conflict, but there are others, including the balancing of different human rights such as freedom of expression and freedom to manifest a religious belief (EDF, 2009a: 9).

¹⁴¹ Sarah Spencer (2007) has described how some observers predicted that the different strands represented at the meetings would fight 'like ferrets in a sack'.

¹⁴² The other being 'public procurement', which, in this context, refers to public bodies using their economic power as a purchaser of goods and services to promote equality.

We can see here that two types of conflict are specified. The first is where the rights of one protected group clash, or are perceived to clash, with those of another. For example, disabled people have a right to be able to access services; however, the fact that some Muslims believe that dogs are 'unclean' may mean a clash with the right of religious groups to have their beliefs accommodated – if, say, a taxi driver is forced to carry guide dogs (Malik, M, 2008: 15). In the second case the right of a group to equality clashes, or is seen to clash, with an individual right. A common example here is that of freedom of speech versus the protection of a religious identity – e.g. the Danish cartoons controversy (ibid: 30).

It is also worth emphasising the point made in the EDF quote, above, that the historical context to this problem is the successful expansion and the strengthening of legislation to cover new grounds. In chapters five and six I linked this development, in part, to the influence of diversity and the attempt to broaden equality policies out beyond the narrower (and more politicised) confines of race and gender, towards an approach that embraces all the many facets of an individual's identity. What we find particularly emphasised in the EDF discourse are the problems that then arise as a consequence of this process: as 'society becomes more diverse and as more excluded groups have access to legislative protection under equality law, there is likely to be more competition between groups (not just race and faith groups but all groups) for access to resources or influence to help address "their" equality issues' (Afridi and Warmington, 2010: 16). In other words, the more rights that exist, the stronger those rights are and the more groups that have them, the more likely it will be that conflicts will be generated.

The EDF discourse does not simply highlight the issue of conflict, it also offers some detailed accounts of possible solutions. However, before I look at some of these in more detail, another feature of the texts to note is the general concern to downplay the problem:

competing interests and conflicts in equality law and policy are a reality, however, there are also political forces that exaggerate the extent and nature of these conflicts. In particular, the principles of gender equality and secularism are

sometimes used as a weapon with which to attack minority communities rather than acting as a guide to pursuing a coherent equalities framework (Malik, M, 2008: 1).

The author of this report, Maleiha Malik, goes on to argue in more detail that public debate – and, in particular, the media – can present the 'problem of conflicts in equality law and policy as widespread and intractable' and that this serves to exaggerate the extent of the problem. One possible reason given for this exaggeration is that racism may help to instil in people the 'assumption that there is a radical difference of values between different social groups in society'. Moreover, Malik argues that this 'source of “competing interests” is likely to continue as past and present patterns of migration into Western Europe from non-Western cultures are mapped on to majority/minority asymmetries of power' (ibid: 6-7). The fact that those critical of equality and diversity tend to emphasise a link between conflict and the framework, while its proponents, such as the EDF, tend to downplay the issue, is, of course, unsurprising. However, as we will see below, there is a clear difference on this point between the EDF and the community cohesion discourse.

Having recognised that while these conflicts may be exaggerated by 'political forces' they are nonetheless a reality, a number of different solutions can be discerned in the EDF texts. Perhaps the most interesting general feature of these solutions is the role played by human rights and the effort, more generally, to construct a neutral legal language through which arbitration can be conducted. I have already mentioned the increasingly interwoven nature of the equality and human rights agendas: in chapter six I argued briefly that this was another example of the way in which group-based equality claims have been combined with the formal, rights-bearing individual fundamental to a liberal-democratic society such as Britain. In this chapter I want to look at this relationship in more detail, and, in particular, the utility of human rights in dealing with conflict. For the EDF the human rights agenda clearly helps to provide a common link, a shared set of principles that bind different individuals and groups together enabling potentially antagonistic perspectives to be reconciled. As Malik (2008: 1) puts it in summing up her paper's main argument: '[a]t the most general level, this paper recommends that competing interests

and conflicts should be resolved by treating human rights standards as the non-negotiable floor within which all equalities law and policy analysis takes place'.

Another EDF text explains how this would work in more detail:

Most rights are not absolute but can be limited where they infringe the rights of others, for instance if the freedom of speech of members of one group infringes the right to private life enjoyed by others. The key tool that the HRA (the Human Rights Act 1998) uses in this balancing act is the principle of necessity and proportionality: it is legitimate to restrict the right of one person, for instance to free speech, only if it is necessary and proportionate to protect the rights of another (EDF, 2006: 16).

For example, it may be the case that the right to non-discrimination for gay people can be limited in certain circumstances if it is deemed a necessary and proportionate measure that will enable the accommodation of the needs of religious groups (in relation to making religious appointments, for example). The idea, in essence, is to construct basic legal principles that can provide – in principle at least – a neutral language all parties can accept, enabling the kind of modification to claims necessary to avoid conflict.¹⁴³

A second example of this idea is worth looking at in more detail. In another paper given at an EDF seminar, Robin Allen, a human rights lawyer, begins with what he describes as the 'turning point' reached in 2005 for diversity as a 'value to be respected in a modern society' (Allen, 2006: 1). According to Allen, the term was, for the first time, recognised officially in legislation requiring a Judicial Appointments Commission to have regard to the 'need to encourage diversity in the range of persons available for selection for appointments' (quoting the 2005 Constitutional Reform Act, *ibid*: 2).¹⁴⁴

While this development is, for the author, laudable, the success of diversity and, in particular, the rapidity of its rise to prominence can generate problems.

However, unlike the examples above, the concern this time is not with potential

¹⁴³ Jack Straw has described human rights as an 'ethical language we can all recognise and sign up to, a...language which doesn't belong to any particular group or creed but to all of us. One that is based on principles of common humanity' (quoted in CFMEB, 2000: 91).

¹⁴⁴ The term had been used in previous legislation but not as a value to be pursued alongside equality. In other words, it was not 'really used to reflect a greater understanding of the diversity of society which required to be reflected in the make up of its institutions' (*ibid*: 5).

in-fighting between protected groups, but rather the confusion and hostility arising from the term's reception in wider society:

the relative legal novelty of this focus [on diversity] has real consequences. Not only does it mean that the public are unlikely to have a generalised understanding of the idea, but importantly judges, also, will still be casting about for an understanding of it. Bluntly put, we are not yet in the territory of legal certainty, let alone widespread acceptance, of the value of diversity in ordinary conversation. It needs to be said explicitly that diversity is really still a social aim rather than a well-defined legal concept.

Allen goes on to draw on his own experience promoting the ideas contained in the HRA:

I know only too well that the promotion into society of an idea such as this is not as straight forward as one might hope. It is too often true that conferences about equality of opportunity attract only those already interested in the subject and not those who need to know about it. The resistance to this kind of thinking by people who would not dream of joining an equality and diversity forum must never be under-estimated (ibid: 5-6).

The body set up to oversee the equality and diversity agenda, the EHRC, is also tasked with the job of promoting these values in wider society, however 'it must expect that ordinary people will ask questions such as: "What does diversity add to equality?", "Why is equality and diversity so important?" and "Why should I care about diversity?" We need to have compelling answers to those questions which can be answered simply and effectively' (ibid: 7).

Allen gives an example of the kind of confusion that can be generated by, in particular, the idea of indirect discrimination. He cites a BBC news story that told of the controversy surrounding a builder who claimed that he was accused of racism by an equality and diversity team at a local job centre. The cause of the dispute being that the advert he wanted to place specified that the applicant must be English-speaking. For the builder in question, and the Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary at the time, the advert was an entirely reasonable request for someone with a specific qualification. For the job centre, on the other hand, it was potentially discriminatory due to the fact that English is a

requirement that may disqualify disproportionate numbers of applicants from different racial groups (ibid: 8-9).

As Allen points out, the truth of the accusation would depend on the extent to which English was in fact a 'necessary requirement' of the post. However, the important point for the author is the effect of well-publicised cases, such as this, on the public standing of the important principles that lie behind the legislation being invoked: 'in this simple story we can see immediately' how easy it was

for a Government agency – no doubt working with the best of intentions to promote equality and diversity – to get into an apparent mess and indeed, importantly, in the process become vilified.

Fortunately the BBC story was relatively straightforward but it is all too easy to see how the repetition of this kind of mistake could swiftly lead the whole idea of equality and diversity into disrepute. Simply to say we were seeking to promote diversity would not have been adequate to the task of explaining the Job Centre's decision (ibid: 10).

While, as we saw in chapter five, diversity first emerged in response to similar controversies surrounding equality policies, it is clear that for Allen the concept is not now able to fulfil that stabilising role without further ideological reinforcement.

What is the solution that Allen proposes? He argues that 'unless this new emphasis on diversity is sufficiently simple and robust to apply, and based on well-established and clear legal principles, it will not be able to weather such a storm of complaint'. What is required then is a supplement to accompany the progress of diversity, one that can provide a sense of certainty and simplicity that diversity alone cannot, a 'legal construct which accurately secures what we want diversity to mean when ordinarily used in a simple discourse like this'. For Allen this can be provided by the concept of dignity as a 'touchstone', a 'guide to help the public to consider more deeply what is the right approach to a situation in which the diversity of our society comes up against some rule or requirement'

(ibid: 10).¹⁴⁵ While there are 'certainly limitations to its practical use, an assessment, in a situation in which equality law is in play, of the way in which objectively the dignity of those involved is affected is helpful and may well lead to the right resolution of a diversity issue' (ibid: 13). In other words, the term provides a simple, shared point of concern that the general public can accept, and that may help in negotiating the complex issues and conflicts that arise from the concrete operation of equality policies.

8.2 Non-Legal Solutions

So far we have considered a legalistic approach to the issue of conflict.¹⁴⁶ However, there are other types of solution proposed in the EDF discourse that are worth mentioning. For example:

Although ECHR jurisprudence permits national authorities to introduce hate speech legislation, the use of the criminal law to protect freedom of religion or belief clearly raises the risk of a conflict between freedom of expression and equality norms. One solution to this conflict is to avoid the use of the criminal law altogether in favour of non-legal responses that aim to achieve some of the goals of protection for minorities, but that do not create the possibility for a conflict with a fundamental human right such as freedom of speech (Malik, M, 2008: 31).

Malik goes on to cite David Richards who 'argues that free speech is an important constitutional and legal tool for minorities who have suffered injustice. It allows them to criticise and challenge dehumanising stereotypes' and 'empowers the legitimacy and integrity of the politics of identity in the reasonable understanding and remedy of structural injustice of group and national identity whose political power has rested on invisibility and

¹⁴⁵ According to Allen the concept of dignity is, alongside equality, a fundamental value on which human rights are based.

¹⁴⁶ While I have focused on the role of human rights in the previous section, it should be mentioned that the EDF also sees some of the developments described in chapter six as having an important role in conflict resolution – in particular, the single, harmonised, public sector equality duty proposed in the 2010 Equality Act: 'the mechanism of the public sector equality duty could provide a unique opportunity to consult widely with local groups in the design of public policies to ensure that potential conflicts are minimised or resolved before they become entrenched. This is a proactive promotion of equality which can prevent conflicts that could lead to costly litigation and tensions in community relations' (Malik, M, 2008: 11).

unspeakability of such injustice' (the first quote is Malik's words, the second quote is Richards' words, *ibid*). This, Malik argues: 'enables a focus on the structural disadvantage of minorities who are the targets of hate speech. It also suggests that giving more voice to all members of minority communities is a more appropriate response to instances of hate speech by individuals from those communities than criminalising them' (*ibid*: 32). In this case, then, the solution lies in the empowerment of a group through utilising the right to free speech rather than seeking to limit it.

Something similar is proposed in relation to the problem of what is sometimes referred to as 'minorities within minorities' – the problematic status that women or gay people, for example, may have within a religious or cultural group. In this case, rather than seeking to legally limit cultural or religious rights in order to protect the internal minority in question, a better approach may be to empower the latter within the larger community:

In some cases, the conflict can be resolved by taking a more complex view of the definition of equality or the ground of discrimination (e.g. ensuring the category 'woman' includes the viewpoints of Muslim women, or the category religion or belief includes the viewpoint of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) faith-holders). In other situations the issue can be resolved by taking a more complex view of membership of the group and empowering 'minorities within minorities' (such as women and LGBT people) who often lack the power to pursue their interests (*ibid*: 2).

It should be stressed that according to Malik there are definite limits to any attempt to reconcile group claims in this way: 'where there is a risk of harm or coercion there should be a policy of zero tolerance which requires state intervention to protect women' (*ibid*). In other words, once an individual's physical wellbeing is threatened, the 'non-negotiable floor' provided by human rights is activated. However, if this is not the case other non-legal practices may be more appropriate.

More generally, there is quite a strong questioning in the EDF discourse of the concept of a community or group – certainly in relation to my other case studies. This can again be explained with reference to the EDF's role in covering all the

strands: too firm a conception of a group – especially, in this context, one based on culture or religion¹⁴⁷ – may help to draw attention away from other inequalities that cut across the boundaries of those communities. In this passage for example – taken from interviews conducted with representatives of EDF's member organisations – the critique of 'groups' echoes quite closely some of the commonly-made criticisms of multiculturalism:

Groups can be oppressive: leaders may not accurately represent the range of people on behalf of whom they are empowered to speak. This can lead to the oppression or exclusion of those who have a different perspective or do not share the dominant values. 'Poor' relations between communities can lead to marginalised communities feeling threatened and retreating into 'traditional' roles in a way that has a negative impact on minorities within minorities – for example women and young people (EDF, 2006: 10).

More recently, the EDF have offered a broader critique of 'identity-based equalities thinking'. In discussing the causes of the Lozells disturbances in Birmingham, which saw conflict between Black and Asian communities in 2005, the authors (Asif Afridi and Joy Warmington) write that Lozells 'demonstrated the limitations of the tools available to authorities in resolving such community conflict. They were operating with a vocabulary and an equalities-set which were largely irrelevant to the circumstances: identity-based equalities thinking might be said to represent the chains which shackled all of the parties to this dispute' (Afridi and Warmington, 2010: 15-6). Further on, it is similarly argued that the 'tendency for equality groups to feel that their experience is unique and cannot be fully understood by anyone outside the group...can prevent different equality groups from recognising the common experiences or causes of discrimination' (ibid: 31-2). While, for the EDF, the continued reality of group inequalities means the identity-based framework cannot be done away with completely,¹⁴⁸ it is worth emphasising the strength of the internal critique of the

¹⁴⁷ The extent to which actual examples of conflict tend to involve religion is noted by the EDF. One report quotes Hanne Stinson (former CEO of the British Humanist Association) on this point: '[s]omehow, when people mention equality and human rights and "conflicting rights", they always seem to be talking about religion' (Afridi and Warmington, 2010: 10).

¹⁴⁸ There is a 'need to recognise that questioning the role of identity in determining individual need does not preclude interventions to address inequality experienced by particular equality groups. The latter is obviously something that will need to continue given the level of inequality experienced by particular groups. This is a message that has not been widely received – and if received, little understood' (Afridi and Warmington, 2010: 38).

equality and diversity framework that we find in the EDF texts – particularly in response to the problem of conflict.

A final, brief example from the EDF discourse on this issue: having noted the apparent intractability of some – particularly, what they call 'win-lose'¹⁴⁹ – situations, Warmington and Afridi recommend that those dealing with conflicts attempt to instil a sense of interconnectedness among those involved. This entails getting the latter to appreciate the extent to which decisions affecting themselves also affect others:

Decision-makers and public officials can help to create the kind of environment in which communities recognise the interconnected nature of decisions regarding equality, especially perhaps those involving the allocation of public resources. When combined with good quality evidence regarding the levels of inequality experienced by vulnerable groups, this could help to facilitate discussions where equality groups 'let go' of particular equality claims, recognising that a successful claim for them might mean another more disadvantaged or more discriminated against group loses out (ibid: 28).

Having referenced the communitarian theorist Robert Putman, the authors of the paper concede that there is 'of course a level of sophistication to this debate which may take some time to translate into the practice of employers and public service providers'. However, 'at the heart of much of these ideas is the need to find better ways to recognise that “my equality claims” are not the only issues at stake in a conflict' (ibid: 29). In other words, there is a need to provide a 'bigger

¹⁴⁹ These situations typically have 'little middle ground for compromise and often end up requiring formal and in some cases legal resolution'; they can also make it 'much harder to repair relationships between parties involved in a conflict in the longer term.' While 'win-lose' conflicts 'can be motivated by a sense of injustice', this 'desire for justice can also become a desire for revenge or retaliation. All of these factors can limit the potential for discussion, negotiation and compromise between groups'. Interestingly, in the same passage, the process described in chapter six – the formalisation of identity-based equality claims into a set of individual rights recognised in law – is also cited as a potential obstacle to more harmonious relations. The authors cite Mary Ann Glendon's description of how 'the act of making a claim into a “right” has the effect of reducing the grounds on which compromise might be achieved: rights can become “trump cards” that outweigh other claims or positions' (see also Dworkin, 1984). Warmington and Afridi (2010: 12) add that even where 'rights are accepted as qualified and are subject to an assessment of their proportionality and reasonableness the act of invoking “a right” can dramatically reduce a claimant's willingness to compromise'.

picture' that may help to 'dampen' the particularistic nature of group-based claims.¹⁵⁰

8.3 Community Cohesion and Diversity

The idea behind this last example from the EDF discourse is a simple one: a solution to conflict generally requires finding or producing something that the antagonists can share in some way; a sense of interconnectedness provides actors with a common social space in which claims of one will affect the other and vice-versa. The same could be said for the importance of human rights in the EDF discourse: human rights help provide a shared framework that actors, whatever their differences, can identify with. The importance, stressed by Malik, of the *non-negotiable* nature of this legal framework is explained by this role. If an interest-group or identity were able to gain an exemption from it then it would no longer be shared; human rights would instead become simply another terrain of battle within the fragmented world of identity politics – a situation that the EDF and others are keen to avoid.

This idea of the importance of something shared, something that can 'bind all the relevant parties' together, is also the fundamental idea behind the New Labour community cohesion discourse. However, there are obvious differences between the two discourses, reflecting the very different problems that each organisation has to confront. The EDF's main concern is to ensure that the problem of conflict does not prevent the formation of a coherent equality and diversity agenda, an agenda that the EDF can then represent. For the New Labour government, on the other hand, it is social order itself that is at stake and the first job of government is, of course, to maintain order – equality and

¹⁵⁰ This promotion of the interconnected nature of inequality is a common theme in the EDF discourse. This is the case not just in relation to the equality and diversity field, but, interestingly, also in relation to the separation between – what I have termed – identity-based inequality and socio-economic inequality. In a speech given in 2007, Sarah Spencer referred to this as the 'gulf among those working for social justice, a strange cavern in the equalities movement which we have not yet addressed' and which has 'serious consequences on equality outcomes'. She ends with a plea: 'for those of us leading NGOs in the parallel equalities and poverty worlds, it's time to talk! We've overlooked your agenda [for] too long, and we'd like to introduce you to ours. If we can secure the same rapprochement between our two fields as we have across the six equality 'strands', then who knows what we might deliver!' (Spencer, 2007).

diversity is of only secondary importance compared with this task. We can see this central difference in organisational aims reflected in a number of features of the community cohesion discourse that are worth mentioning: 1) the discourse was initiated in response to a single manifestation of conflict – the disturbances that took place in various Northern towns in the summer of 2001; 2) the diagnosis of the problem appears to suggest that the equality and diversity agenda may itself be – at least partially – responsible; 3) the solutions proposed take us, to some extent, outside the narrower confines of the established equality and diversity discourse that the EDF puts forward. In particular, and probably what has generated most controversy, there is an appeal not just to shared values in terms of a human rights framework, but to shared *British* values stressing the importance of integrating minority communities into a national culture. There is, in other words, a shift from a 'thinner', formal, legal solution to conflict to a 'thicker', more substantive focus on a common national identity.

As I've said, the starting point for the community cohesion discourse is 2001. It comes at the end of the period (roughly the mid-1990s to the early 2000s) that I have already identified as a key period for the development of equality and diversity – in particular, when diversity becomes firmly established alongside equality. I've also already mentioned the importance of the Stephen Lawrence murder and its aftermath in previous chapters; it is worth emphasising the impact it had on a young New Labour government and the impetus it gave to that government's determination to tackle race inequality (Hewitt, 2005: 52). Another important parallel development is the increasing significance of terrorism and, more importantly, its link with Islamic fundamentalism in the formation of New Labour policy – 9/11 in 2001 and the 7th July bombings in 2005 are obvious reference points here. The latter has been important in increasing the extent to which integrating, specifically, Muslim communities has come to be seen as the main challenge to a successful multicultural society (as I mentioned in chapter one). I won't explore these developments further here though, or the way in which they overlap with the community cohesion discourse. My focus is solely on the modification of the equality and diversity framework that community cohesion brings about.

In terms of the texts used for this analysis, I've again taken a relatively small sample – most of which have been produced by the Home Office. *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team* (also known as the Cattle Report) and the Government's response to this report are probably the best known of the documents I have relied on – certainly in the earlier phase of the development of the cohesion agenda (Home Office, 2001a, 2001b).¹⁵¹ Other key texts are *Strength in Diversity* (Home Office, 2004a) and *Our Shared Future*. The latter is the report of an organisation set up by New Labour to investigate the problem of social conflict: the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (2007b). The other texts used in this chapter are less significant but provide some useful insights into community cohesion as a functioning policy discourse.

If we turn, first of all, to the Cattle Report of 2001 into the disturbances that took place in the summer of that year, the first thing to notice is the strength of the language used in the report's portrayal of the areas affected by the violence:

Whilst the physical segregation of housing estates and inner city areas came as no surprise, the team was particularly struck by the depth of polarisation of our towns and cities. The extent to which these physical divisions were compounded by so many other aspects of our daily lives, was very evident. Separate educational arrangements, community and voluntary bodies, employment, places of worship, language, social and cultural networks, means that many communities operate on the basis of a series of parallel lives. These lives often do not seem to touch at any point, let alone overlap and promote any meaningful interchanges (Home Office, 2001a: 9).

The idea of 'parallel lives' was a particularly resonant phrase to emerge from the review, capturing the sense of acute segregation among the different communities that composed the towns affected by the violence (Bradford, Burnley and Oldham). While we saw the issue of conflict and division played

¹⁵¹ I should also mention three reports that were carried out into each of the areas affected by the disturbances in 2001: the Clarke report (Burnley), the Ritchie report (Oldham) and the Ouseley report (Bradford) – though the last of these was in fact published just before the riots occurred. I have focused on the national reports however as I believe these give a better indication of the more general interaction between the concept of cohesion and the equality and diversity framework that I am trying to capture here.

down in the EDF discourse, here we see a strongly made claim for the reality of such phenomena.

It is made clear in the community cohesion discourse that the problem is not the existence of differences as such, but rather the fact that the differences found do not appear to be the result of the exercise of individual choice:

There are a number of reasons why people may choose to be close to others like themselves...There is nothing intrinsically wrong about people exercising choice in this way...[However] there are reasons why we should be concerned about the apparent trend towards more segregated communities...geographical segregation is likely to contribute to a lack of opportunity for different communities to meet, to have a dialogue and work together...segregation may not reflect choice but a real and damaging lack of choice about housing, jobs and schools (Home Office, 2001b: 12-3).

If, as we have seen, one of the primary aims behind the introduction of diversity is an attempt to individualise group-based equality claims, what appears to be registered here is a failure of that attempt. Behind the disturbances lies the existence of 'parallel lives': segregated communities that negate individual autonomy and do not enable the harmonious co-existence of different cultures in which an individual is free to choose their social attachments.

Of course, both the facts on the ground that the Cantle review team claim to uncover, as well as the explanation of those facts, is a hugely contested and controversial area. The community cohesion discourse has certainly itself caused controversy among proponents of multiculturalism: in arguing that segregation is both a reality and one which is to some extent attributable to the promotion of diversity, the community cohesion discourse appears to side with the critics of multiculturalism. This critical view has been put forward, perhaps most famously, by Trevor Phillips, former head of the CRE, who argued, as mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, that there was a danger of 'sleepwalking to segregation'.¹⁵² Defenders of multiculturalism, on the other hand, tend to reject that segregation is an empirical reality on the scale that

¹⁵² In full, Phillips argued that 'we are sleepwalking our way to segregation. We are becoming strangers to each other, and we are leaving communities to be marooned outside the mainstream' (quoted in Hasan, 2010: 1).

critics suggest (see, for example, Finney and Simpson, 2009). Furthermore, for those on this side of the debate, even where there is evidence of 'parallel lives' this can be explained by inequality and the legacy of discrimination rather than the pursuit of multicultural policies.¹⁵³

While the latter argument is certainly recognised in the texts – and, as we will see below, equality policies more generally continue to be seen as important – the community cohesion discourse nonetheless puts forward, as its central message, that there is a problematic lack of unity among different groups and that this is a key cause of the segregation found. In response, emphasis is put on the importance of commonly-held values as a way of bridging the gap between groups:

It is easy to focus on systems, processes and institutions and to forget that Community Cohesion fundamentally depends on people and their values. Indeed, many of the present problems seem to owe a great deal to the failure to communicate and agree a set of clear values that can govern behaviour. This failure is evident at both the national and local levels, and it has led to community breakdown in some parts of the country, due to particular circumstances or triggers (Home Office, 2001a: 18).

There is a sense in which it is less the values themselves that are important, however, and more the process through which different groups and people come to identify with those values: '[p]art of the power of the concept of shared values lies in the debate itself' (Home Office, 2004a: 8). In other words, integration is not just about finding values that everyone can agree to, it is, perhaps more importantly, about identifying with a dialogue through which these more substantive principles are produced.

As already mentioned, in a related sense there is also a stress on a particular shared identity, as an important corollary of shared values, that sets the community cohesion discourse apart somewhat from the EDF discourse. More

¹⁵³ See, for example, Chris Gaine's response to John Denham's defence of government policy: 'I would take issue with...the assumption...that the 2001 riots in three northern towns were due to "divided communities". This is true as far as it goes, but misleading when linked with an alleged self-segregation by south Asians, Muslims in particular. What this now largely accepted idea does not take into account is the years of discrimination, both in jobs and housing, experienced by Asian (and black) populations' (Gaine, 2010: 16).

specifically, an inclusive British identity needs to be constructed. This promotion of a strong national identity – a feature of New Labour ideology more generally¹⁵⁴ – not only marks a point of divergence with the EDF discourse, but also the Parekh Report. In the latter, the authors argue explicitly for reimagining Britain as a 'post-nation' (though clearly the extent of the shift depends on how exactly the idea of a 'post-nation' should be interpreted) (CFMEB, 2000: 36). In contrast consider, for example, the following passage:

To build a successful integrated society we need to promote an inclusive concept of citizenship, which goes further than the strictly legal definition of nationality and articulates the rights and responsibilities we share. Building this wider notion of active citizenship through participation, volunteering and civic action, underpinned by a sense of shared values, is one of the main ways in which we can strengthen the relationships and connections between communities. We need to ensure that all citizens feel a sense of pride in being British and a sense of belonging to this country and to each other, and to ensure that our national symbols, like the Union Jack and the flags of the four nations, are not the tools of extremists, but visibly demonstrate our unity, as we saw through the Golden Jubilee celebrations (Home Office, 2004a: 6).

It is easy to see from passages such as this why the community cohesion discourse, and Labour policy more generally, has attracted the charge of assimilationism (see, for example, Back et al, 2002).

However, while a shared British identity is certainly a strong theme, it is stressed at a number of points in the discourse that assimilation, in the more obvious sense of a single, homogenous national culture, is not what is being championed. For example, the same text argues that

Integration is not about assimilation into a single homogenous culture and there is space within the concept of "British" for people to express their religious and cultural beliefs. We see this in practice in the sensitisation of public services to accommodate different expressions of identity or belief, for example the adaptation of uniforms in schools and key public services, like the police, to include Muslim hijabs and Sikh turbans (Home Office, 2004a: 7).

¹⁵⁴ On the relationship between nationalism and New Labour ideology see Pitcher (2007, chapter two).

There are plenty of examples within the community cohesion discourse of this kind of statement. Indeed I would go so far as to say that we see – perhaps paradoxically – some of the strongest affirmations of the importance of difference or diversity here, as opposed to my other case studies. For example, in the Commission on Integration and Cohesion report (2007b: 161) the authors write of the need for the 'continued protection of distinct identities'. Similarly in the Cattle Report it is stated that while the 'promotion of “cohesion” could itself become a desirable and legitimate focus for funding', this approach 'should not be seen as an attempt to undermine separate and distinct cultures – this would not be compatible with valuing diversity' (Home Office, 2001a: 27).

One final, unusually candid, example from a document reporting on the first six months of the 'Community Cohesion Pathfinder Programme' (a programme establishing template schemes promoting community cohesion in local settings): the text advises that

It is important to use the Community Cohesion agenda as a means of celebrating diversity rather than emphasising multiculturalism as a problem. This is best brought about by frankness and transparency in communications with Members [of local councils], recognising both that *there is natural competition between communities and that this is not necessarily unhealthy* (Home Office, 2003a: 4 – my emphasis).

These examples show much more than a gesture towards the value of diversity then; they demonstrate a very clear appreciation, from the government's point of view, of the positive benefits of difference using some strong terms: the 'protection of distinct identities', the importance of not only distinct but *separate* cultures, and the healthy nature of 'natural competition' between communities.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵ The value of diversity is also recognised in the definition of cohesion adopted by the government in guidance for local authorities. A cohesive community has four characteristics: 'there is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities'; 'the diversity of people's different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued'; 'those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities'; finally, 'strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods' (Home Office, 2003a: 1).

The point here is not to try to weigh up the textual evidence for either side – i.e. whether the community cohesion discourse is assimilationist or not – partly due to space constraints and partly because the very meaning of the term 'assimilation' is not an easy one to pin down. Rather, I want to limit my interpretation of the community cohesion discourse to my overall argument about the evolving nature of the equality and diversity framework. In this sense, I would see community cohesion less in relation to the question of unity versus difference and more as a case of how unity (or cohesion) acts as a necessary third – and more recent – element of the framework. Just as it was possible to show how the rise of diversity did not mean a replacement of group-based equality policies, but a different way of pursuing those same policies, so the addition of cohesion does not imply a rejection of equality and diversity. This can be seen in both the continued affirmations of difference in this section and in the continued affirmations of the importance of equality policies in the following section.

The key point, then, is the change in the way in which the same group-based policies are pursued with the addition of the idea of cohesion:

We need more integration, but we also want each community to feel proud of its heritage and traditions – in other words we need a type of multi-culturalism in which everyone supports the values and laws of the nation, whilst keeping hold of their cultural identity...All citizens, whether by birth or naturalised, White or from a Black and minority ethnic (BME) group, whatever their faith, need to be able to see themselves as 'British', whether or not they add their cultural identity to the term (Home Office, 2004b: 8).

We can see here that the idea of different, sub-national, cultural identities is, again, very important (citizens need to keep 'hold' of them). However this is understood in relation to a single British identity. While the latter may lack the cultural significance it once had, it nonetheless retains its importance as a single, overarching object of identification. Of course, this solution is not necessarily without its problems and may involve another tricky balancing act alongside that which we have already seen between equality, on the one hand, and diversity, on the other. The continued promotion of sub-national cultural

identities, for example, may start to pull the individuals concerned away from the wider national identification demanded.

The question, in other words, is whether Britishness can provide the more than purely legalistic or formal identity required for cohesion if sub-national cultural identities continue to be protected. This problem can also be expressed in the language of citizenship. We've already seen the need to 'promote an inclusive concept of citizenship' that 'goes further than the strictly legal definition of nationality' (Home Office, 2004a: 6). However, how can this be done without abandoning the ideal of cultural diversity?

One suggestion that we find in the texts is to link citizenship to the locality – i.e. to the sub-national geographical area shared by the different groups in question. For example, the interim statement of the Commission on Integration and Cohesion report begins with agreeing that 'Britishness' is an 'important unifying force', but that it is 'at its best when developed in a way that resonates with all communities'. The text then goes on to state that a 'focus on the local provides a practical shared concern for communities to rally around'.

Additionally, polling carried out for the report 'suggests that both national pride and local civic pride could be of equal importance when we are considering policies to build integration and cohesion' and that a 'focus on the local may well be what makes Britishness mean something to people at grassroots level' (Commission on Integration and Cohesion, 2007a: 30-1). More concretely, the text suggests 'fostering a local debate on shared values based around a national framework...enabling local authorities to negotiate local identities by posing the question "What is it to be from Birmingham?" (for example) and seeing if a local consensus can be built' (ibid: 31). There is, then, a second function of geography in the equality and diversity discourse, alongside its importance as a way of understanding inequality (as analysed in the previous chapter). Here it plays a kind of bridging role in helping to bring a more substantive dimension to national identity, but one that, as in the previous chapter, is crucially distinct from the 'identity' groups of equality and diversity.

8.4 Community Cohesion and Equality

As we have seen, the community cohesion discourse can be seen as an acceptance (up to a point) of, and a response to, the criticism of multicultural policies that the promotion of diversity encourages segregation and division. In a similar manner, the community cohesion discourse can also be seen as a response to another commonly-made criticism of multiculturalism, but this time in relation to the promotion of equality. The charge is that by emphasising ethnic minority disadvantage, equality policies end up ignoring the considerable disadvantage that exists among the white majority population.

For example, there is a section on 'Disadvantaged and Disaffected Communities' in the 2001 Cattle Report that strongly criticises the 'equalities agenda' for not including white people within it, or, to put it another way, for assuming that inequality was exclusively a characteristic of black and ethnic minority communities. The report notes that the

equalities agenda has become heavily associated with black and ethnic minority groups despite efforts to promote a more inclusive agenda. There is an assumption that black and ethnic minority groups are in need and, in general, that their needs will be the greatest...We must, therefore, re-define the equalities agenda...[so that it] clearly and fundamentally, relates to need and is not seen to exclude any community, such as the white community (Home Office, 2001a: 39).

The report also states that there is an 'urgent need to recognise a more diverse and sophisticated approach to "needs", which takes on board, for example, the new requirements of recent asylum seekers and the growing disaffection of young males from some established white communities' (ibid). In other words, equality strategies risk missing particular disadvantaged groups that do not fall within the equality categories traditionally associated with those policies. We have seen the basic form of this argument a number of times already: that there is a need to broaden the appeal of equality and diversity policies beyond the minority groups most closely associated with them. What is specific about the community cohesion discourse is that this argument is linked very explicitly with the problem of social order. In other words, if there continues to be favouritism –

or, rather, the *perception* of favouritism¹⁵⁶ – in the implementation of policies, there is a real risk that conflict between communities will be generated as a result.

As we have seen with diversity, the problem is not with equality but with the particular way in which that value has been pursued. There are many strong affirmations of the importance of equality and the 'equalities agenda' within the community cohesion discourse. Indeed the cohesion agenda and the race equality agenda become explicitly linked as a joint government programme: one report makes this recommendation when advising that 'Community Cohesion needs to be “mainstreamed” and much more closely linked to the racial equality agenda' adding that the latter is still 'essential to tackle disadvantage' (Home Office, 2004b: 8).¹⁵⁷

So the need is to reformulate rather than reject equality, and while this point is sometimes made in relation to equality in general, it is the group mentioned at the beginning of this section that is clearly the main concern. Just as it is ethnic minority groups that tend to be most commonly thought to benefit from multiculturalism, so it is white disadvantaged communities that are most often understood to lose out. It is worth considering why this might be the case in more detail, as it helps us to gain a better insight into the nature of the community cohesion discourse and the particular problem to which it is responding. The situation is, at first glance, straightforward: while the white disadvantaged are clearly an unequal group in society, the most obvious marker of this group's identity, whiteness, is also the principal marker of a majority identity; they do not therefore benefit from an equality and diversity agenda that, as we have seen, pursues substantive, redistributive equality for various minority groups in order to rectify social inequality.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ This is an important clause to add – generally, even the community cohesion discourse does not go so far as to say that the equality and diversity agenda actually does favour ethnic minorities.

¹⁵⁷ The full titles of two Home Office (2004a, 2005) reports also demonstrate this: *Strength in Diversity: Towards a Community Cohesion and Race Equality Strategy* and *Improving Opportunity, Strengthening Society: The Government's strategy to increase race equality and Community Cohesion*.

¹⁵⁸ We saw in chapter four that white racism has a fundamental, antagonistic, quality that sets it apart from other inequalities and sources of oppression in society. Furthermore, this recognition of a racial antagonism between white and non-white is an essential element of the equality and diversity framework, an element that sits alongside the attempt to universalise the framework so that all groups are included within it.

However, this is not the only point. What is particularly noticeable in the community cohesion discourse – unsurprisingly given its name – is the emphasis on white *communities*. In so far as the white disadvantaged suffer from socio-economic inequality (as opposed to identity-based inequality) they are, of course, recognised as unequal. What the community cohesion discourse is particularly attuned to however are the aspects of disadvantage that tend to fall more readily under the 'identity' label. By this I mean the kind of issues that cannot be dealt with through a quantitative reduction in inequality that cuts across distinct groups, but rather concern the qualitative relations between the disadvantaged, the state and other social interests. Take, for example, inequality as a lack of effective participation, both generally in relation to the democratic process, but also more specifically in terms of involving those who are to benefit from equality policies in the planning and delivery of those policies.¹⁵⁹ In order to do this at a practical level the disadvantaged need to be represented, and in order to do this a significant, qualitative group identity of some kind is obviously required. We can see then that only rectifying socio-economic inequality, *as separated from identity-based disadvantage*, may not be adequate to dealing with the inequality of the white disadvantaged.

This point can be illustrated further by returning to a development mentioned in the previous chapter: the adoption of a race equality perspective as an important dimension of the social exclusion agenda. A key feature of this development is the need to ensure that ethnic minorities, through their representatives, are involved in the policy process. For example, one report states that

neighbourhood renewal will not work and will not be sustained unless people living in deprived areas get involved. People from minority ethnic communities are more likely to live in deprived areas than others and this report highlights how important their participation and leadership in the design and delivery of services in those areas will be to the success of the National Strategy. It also suggests various ways in which such participation and leadership can be encouraged (SEU, 2000: 5).

¹⁵⁹ See the third part of the collection of debates, edited by Olson (2008), between Nancy Fraser and her critics that deals with this political, participatory element of justice as an addition to her famous distinction between redistribution and recognition.

If we then turn to the Cattle Report – published a year later – we can see the text respond to an obvious side-effect of this emphasis on ethnic minority participation:

We would urge the inclusion of representatives (and leaders) of a broader range of groups in strategic level planning of regeneration, alongside existing black and ethnic minority networks. Indeed, there seems to be an absence of white community leaders in some areas and it is assumed that their needs are being addressed by mainstream political and institutional leaders. This means that the views of the white communities are unheard in discussions about the distribution of resources... Representation should be drawn from both white and non-white communities and the white community should be encouraged to develop a leadership capacity in the same way as the black and ethnic minority communities (Home Office, 2001a: 39-40).¹⁶⁰

So we can see, then, a direct link between a race equality perspective in one policy area (social exclusion) and a concern with the effects of this in another (community relations). What is perhaps most striking is that this attempt in the community cohesion discourse to rebalance the concern with ethnic minority disadvantage takes exactly the same ethnic form: whiteness is explicitly suggested as a marker of identity enabling the participation of disadvantaged communities in the implementation of social policy.

Interestingly, it is not only identity-based equality policies that are identified as problematic in the community cohesion discourse. Policies based on a geographical understanding of inequality are also criticised: '[h]istorically, the competitive nature of some regeneration funding has been a focus for inter-community and inter-neighbourhood tension. Some regeneration schemes had the effect of pitting neighbourhoods against each other in competing for resources'. This has 'generated resentment and suspicion across communities in some areas – a feeling that "other" areas were being favoured in the allocation of resources. This seems to be exacerbated in parts of the country

¹⁶⁰ The same warning about excluding white communities appears throughout the cohesion discourse. For instance, another text advises those working on area-regeneration schemes that there is a 'tendency to build the leadership and develop representatives from the minority communities. Do not neglect the white community who will also need to be involved in the change' (Home Office, 2004c: 28).

where ethnic minority communities live in different areas to white communities' (Local Government Association, 2002: 28). It is worth noting in relation to the last sentence that while the problem is 'exacerbated' by those situations in which the geographical difference combines with ethnic difference this is not always the case. This implies that the 'marking' of inequality according to geography alone is enough to cause conflicts without the added factor of ethnicity. The solution is the same in both cases however: more sophistication is required in how the needs of disadvantaged people are met. For example, the Cattle Report calls for a 'change from area based initiatives [ABIs] to more thematic approaches...programmes targeted at young people involved with drugs, the development of literacy and communication skills, achievement through sport, or IT skills, irrespective of race, or area, might now be more appropriate and more inclusive' (Home Office, 2001a: 39).

It should also be said that, within the community cohesion discourse, the problem with geographical approaches or ABIs is not simply the potential social conflict caused, but also the inability of geography to fully 'capture' inequality. In other words, just as we have seen how identity-based categories (race, gender, sexuality etc) can be insufficient to adequately respond to the complex nature of inequality, so the same can be said of geographical categories. A deprived area, for example, targeted by policy-makers, may include wealthy families; conversely wealthy areas excluded from equality policies may include 'pockets of deprivation'. Again, 'thematic approaches' are required: by targeting specific issues rather than geographical areas, these are a 'means by which more widespread deprivation or specific pockets of deprivation are addressed and communities are encouraged to work together' (Home Office, 2003b: 9). A concept of 'area focus' is also suggested that should be 'fully explored as a means of creating more flexible areas, recognising that some programmes can have different boundaries to reflect different needs whilst still maintaining an area approach'. The conclusion is that: '[w]ell-designed ABIs can have a positive impact on cohesion, whilst those which are not can exacerbate existing problems' (ibid). We can see from this last quote that, once again, the basic thrust behind the concept of cohesion is not to put in question equality policies deemed to be socially and politically necessary, the point is rather to attempt to

make these policies more sophisticated in light of concerns about their impact on social relations.

8.5 Conclusion

Both discourses featured in this chapter originate at a time when equality and diversity had become a well-established agenda, and both, in different ways, express concern that conflict may be a consequence of this development. For the EDF the problems and corresponding answers are much more about the equality and diversity field itself. In line with the aims of the organisation, the main concern is to ensure that the various different organisations that form the EDF's membership are able to come together in a relatively non-conflictual way. The emphasis on human rights, as an overarching legal framework within which different interests and identities can be negotiated, is a key part of the EDF's solution. For the New Labour government's community cohesion discourse, on the other hand, the main concern is with the broader quality of social relations. While the discourse is undoubtedly best known for its emphasis on the promotion of common values, and particularly on a reclamation of Britishness in order to prevent conflict among communities, I've also highlighted its attempts to modify the way equality policies function – policies that use both identity and geography to understand and respond to inequality.

Before turning to the concluding chapter of this thesis, I want to make a final point about the general idea of cohesion at work in both the EDF and community cohesion discourse. While in previous chapters I've focused on the combination of equality and diversity as constituting the ideological framework whose development I have traced in a number of different contexts, we can now add cohesion to this model. As I've mentioned above, we can think of cohesion as a third value that combines with both equality and diversity forming a complex tripartite structure whose dynamics I have touched on in this chapter. As with diversity, cohesion can be understood as playing an important role in the integration and institutionalisation of equality measures in response to controversies surrounding their implementation. If, as we have seen in previous chapters, diversity adds an individualising dynamic – making the group identity

necessary to carry out equality policies part of the multifaceted individual – cohesion could be said to add a unifying dynamic, ensuring a common bond among the various groups recognised.

Furthermore, just as I have traced in previous chapters not just the way in which 'equality' and 'diversity' combine but the points where this combination appears to be unstable, we have seen the way in which an emphasis on cohesion can similarly put a strain on the coherence of the equality and diversity framework. Perhaps most obviously this is the case in the community cohesion discourse's concern for the group most commonly associated with a rejection of the framework: white disadvantaged communities. As I have explained, on account of the fact that they are of the majority ethnicity they cannot have the 'groupness' of their inequality understood in ethnic terms without this putting in jeopardy a foundational aspect of the equality and diversity framework: the inequality between ethnic minorities and the white majority. Particularly striking are those passages in which this recognition of white disadvantage leads to policy recommendations that call for the involvement of white communities alongside non-white communities, without any qualification that would retain the asymmetry between them (such as adding 'working-class' to the category of white disadvantage but not to ethnic minority disadvantage, as we saw in the Runnymede discourse in chapter four). For example: 'the white community should be encouraged to develop a leadership capacity *in the same way* as the black and ethnic minority communities' (Home Office, 2001a: 40 – my emphasis). These points in the discourse can be interpreted as moments where the emphasis on cohesion, on the need to maintain a unified social field, stretches the framework and pulls it away from the logic implied by the concept of equality as it has evolved from anti-racist struggles (i.e. the recognition of a fundamental inequality or asymmetry between white and non-white). Again, we can draw a parallel with the concept of diversity and the tendency the latter has, as we have seen, to pull away from the concept of equality.¹⁶¹ However, neither concept appears to break with equality altogether, leaving an unstable and contradictory, but nonetheless relatively unified ideological framework.

¹⁶¹ For example, we saw in chapter six the example of the diversity management discourse including differences within the equality and diversity agenda that obviously have nothing to do with inequality: '[t]he diversity I'm talking about includes not only race, gender, creed, and ethnicity but also age, background, education, function, and personality differences' (Thomas, 1990: 114).

Chapter Nine: Equality, Diversity and Integration

In this final chapter I will offer a fairly substantial conclusion. My aim here is not only to summarise the theoretical and empirical findings presented in the main body of the thesis, but also to develop an argument about the ideological significance of diversity – an argument that emerges from these findings, but which still needs to be articulated. In order to do this I will generally structure this chapter around the previous ones, following the order in which they appear; the only exception to this is that here I will start with chapter four before going back to the earlier chapters. Throughout I will highlight those areas of my argument that I have not been able to develop further – for reasons of space or time – but which may prove to be fruitful avenues for future research.

9.1 *Hegemony and Multiculturalism*

My aim in chapter four was to describe a basic ideational framework common to the equality and diversity discourse as a whole. The picture of society that emerges is one made up of a number of groups that have a distinct identity based on a particular non-class characteristic such as race, gender, sexuality and so on; these groups are also disadvantaged in relation to a comparatively-advantaged 'majority' group based on those same characteristics. While there are a variety of inequalities, I also noted that racism tends to be of particular significance and racial inequalities tend to be understood as threatening to society in a way that other inequalities are not. Furthermore, there is an important separation between two types of social inequality recognised within the discourse: identity-based and socio-economic. Class inequality, I argued, is split along these lines: it often falls into the second type of inequality; however, the idea of a disadvantaged class *identity* – especially with the prefix 'white' attached – is also present within the discourse.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of the framework to pin down is the idea of difference signalled by the term 'diversity'. In chapter four I suggested that the

variety or multiplicity that diversity refers to¹⁶² can be understood in relation to social groups defined by various characteristics or to individuals within those groups – in other words, it has both social and individual dimensions. Diversity can also refer to a variety of politicised differences, in which the difference in question serves as the basis of a temporary political mobilisation, as well as depoliticised group-state relations in which the minority group has a relatively stable, permanent place within society. Alongside the individual/social opposition, there is also, then, a conflict/integration opposition that serves to further complicate diversity as a concept. As well as helping to get across how complex the term is, these different nuances can also aid us in understanding the various developments that I trace in the following chapters.

Also of help in understanding my findings are the ideas of Laclau, as discussed in the second chapter. As we saw, for Laclau hegemonic formations are produced along two axes: through an equivalence that constructs an identity in opposition to a threatening outside, and through the 'differential absorption of demands'. The latter describes the dissolution of potentially threatening identities, through the construction of a relationship between different elements comprising that identity, on the one hand, and the state, on the other (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 129-30). This second dimension of hegemony is of particular interest in relation to multiculturalism – more specifically, the link drawn between social differences and political integration. Laclau attempts to capture here, using an abstract model, a political process in which a relation of conflict or antagonism is translated into a relation of difference such that the element (say, a particular interest group) finds its place within society and is able to coexist with other groups and the state in a relatively peaceful manner. This model would seem to fit what we saw in chapter three quite well. There we saw a response to conflict on the part of various local councils that broke down an antagonistic 'black' identity by establishing relations with the latter's constituent parts. In other words, a relatively stable relationship was constructed between the state and a variety of distinct ethnic groups.

¹⁶² The dictionary definition of diversity is 'the state of being varied', 'a range of different things' (Oxford University Press, 2001: 260).

Accompanying this development, we see the emergence of what I've generally called a framework but what we might equally call, following Laclau, a myth. Recall the first aim of Bradford Council's race relations document cited in chapter three: to 'bring about social justice' through establishing an '[e]quality of esteem between different cultures'. In response to a conflict-ridden social order, an ideational model is presented that depicts reality as composed of a number of culturally distinct, unequal groups. Harmony can be returned to society through establishing equality between such groups while, at the same time, ensuring their differences are recognised and respected.

These ideas about identity, inequality and difference are key to the formulation and implementation of a variety of policies. As we saw, the latter included funding for community facilities, the promotion of activities to celebrate distinct cultural identities, as well as the establishment of channels of communication – that is, political relationships whereby 'leaders' or representatives of the communities would be involved in the decision-making process. Alongside these, we also find the kind of policies that concern me for much of the rest of the thesis: policies that place the goal of group equality over that of formal anti-discrimination measures (the latter referring to the treatment of individuals without reference to characteristics such as race or gender). This kind of policy can take a variety of forms; the shared aim, however, is a redistribution of various social goods (resources, opportunities in employment, opportunities in education and business, participation in culture and sport, health levels and so on) from a privileged majority to a disadvantaged minority.

Of course, as I have emphasised a number of times in this thesis, any historical process is best seen as one of both gradual drift as well as points of origin, and it is certainly the case that there are precursors to this course of action – multiculturalism did not arise out of nothing. Nonetheless, in terms of the urgency of the issue (in response to the riots and disturbances of the first half of the 1980s), and the willingness to address the problem using substantial administrative budgets, there is clearly an important shift here. This periodisation is also backed up through the findings from my case studies. We have seen, in the case of both Fawcett and the TUC, that it is in the texts of the

1980s that we first see references to the kind of redistributive equality policy just described.

What we gain from combining this historical analysis with Laclau's concepts is both a formal theoretical model with which to capture the former, but also a stress on the *hegemonic* nature of multiculturalism, in the sense that Laclau, following Gramsci, has sought to give the term. This is an important point: in my opinion, critics – particularly left-wing critics – of multiculturalism can sometimes give too much weight to the role of autonomous elites in the rise of multiculturalism. Perhaps the best example of this is Brian Barry's (2001a: 292-299) description of the ability of an elite cabal of 'academics, lawyers, politicians, civil servants and officials from think-tanks and quangos' (ibid: 294) to manipulate the political process and bypass the interests of the general public.¹⁶³ Malik too (2009: chapter two) – while offering a much more detailed historical description of the rise of multiculturalism – can sometimes give this impression. He writes at one point that Birmingham local-council policies 'did not respond to the needs of communities, but to a large degree *created* those communities by imposing identities on people...They empowered not individuals within minority communities, but so-called "community leaders", who owed their position and influence largely to the relationship they possessed with the state' (ibid: 67). Both authors offer quite a 'top-down' interpretation of the origin of multiculturalism, then, in which the state, or elite groups connected with the state, impose an agenda on a seemingly passive population.¹⁶⁴

Laclau's Gramscian stress on hegemony – as a process in which consent is produced through a more active two-way process between the governed and the governing – enables a different interpretation: that the interests and demands of the anti-racist movement that the state confronted in the early 1980s were not straightforwardly rejected in the pursuit of difference. Rather, utilising Laclau's theory we can ask how these demands were incorporated into

¹⁶³ Barry undoubtedly leaves himself vulnerable to criticisms from defenders of multiculturalism on this point. For example, Bhikhu Parekh (2002: 138) has (with, I think, some justification) attacked this argument as a 'naïve conspiracy theory'.

¹⁶⁴ A focus on hegemony can also improve on Michaels' (2006: 206) argument that the 'continuing success' of diversity 'is a function of its utility to neoliberalism'. This appeal to functionalism bypasses the need to explain the more precise mechanism through which individuals become attached to the ideological framework.

the political and social order as an aspect of the broader project of integrating minority groups. To incorporate a demand as part of a hegemonic project obviously differs from the straightforward rejection of that demand. At the same time, incorporation suggests a process through which that demand is made compatible with the wider social and political interests of the hegemonic agent. In this sense, the imposition of identities that Malik describes may have been made possible less by ignoring community needs – and the associated demands through which those needs were articulated – and more by meeting those needs, while at the same time *altering* the way in which they were framed in relation to other, more established, interests in society.

This, I believe, is a good interpretation of my case study findings in relation to the specific demand for redistributive equality policies, and it is an interpretation I will expand on in discussing these findings in the following sections of this chapter. Before I do this though I want to return to Laclau's thought and, in particular, the relationship between, on the one hand, the ontological differences separating Žižek and Laclau and, on the other, their respective analyses of multiculturalism. This is important because while I have utilised some of Laclau's concepts, I have sought to link them with, what is for me, Žižek's convincing critique of Laclau's poststructuralism.

Žižek, like Malik and Sivanandan in their respective historical analyses, stresses the importance, in analysing multiculturalism, of distinguishing clearly between an oppositional moment (of which left-wing critics of multiculturalism are often supportive) and the hegemonic response I have outlined on the part of the state. In responding to Judith Butler, for example, he argues that:

I fully endorse queer politics in so far as it 'metaphorizes' its specific struggle as something that – if its objectives were to be realized – undermines the very potentials of capitalism. However, I tend to think that, in the course of the ongoing transformation into the 'post-political' tolerant multiculturalist regime, today's capitalist system is able to neutralize queer demands, to absorb them as a 'specific way of life' (Žižek, 1999: 225).

For Žižek, as we saw in chapter two, it is important to retain the Marxist emphasis on the 'capitalist system'; however, as he makes clear, this does not

mean that non-class struggles cannot be understood to have a very important impact in relation to this system. What we need to understand, in relation to multiculturalism, is how this initial disruptive potential comes to be replaced by a depoliticised recognition of difference.¹⁶⁵

For Laclau, on the other hand, all this constitutes a return to a naive Marxism. For him there isn't a critical political moment in which various antagonistic struggles are integrated into the system fundamentally transforming their nature. Rather, the plurality or diversity of antagonisms that emerges post-war puts the very idea of a 'capitalist system' into doubt. While there is nothing in Laclau's approach preventing the analysis of the institutionalisation of identity politics – or the identification of the general depoliticising trend in which diversity becomes more of a corporate buzzword than a rallying call for social justice – these developments do not put multiculturalism itself into question, as they do for Zizek and, following Zizek, for me. In other words, for Laclau it is the way in which multiculturalism has been combined with less progressive policies, rather than multiculturalism itself, that is to blame for the problems detected by Zizek: 'the evolution of the parties of the Left has been such that they have become concerned mainly with the middle classes, to the detriment of the workers', *however* 'this is due to their incapacity to envisage an alternative to neo-liberalism and their uncritical acceptance of the imperatives of "flexibility", not to a supposed infatuation with issues of "identity"' (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: xviii).

In chapter two I suggested that we might utilise Laclau's distinction between dislocation and antagonism in order to capture the significance of various post-war, non-class struggles for Zizek (the new social movements [NSMs]). Whereas for Laclau these struggles are understood as a plurality of antagonisms in response to the dislocations wrought by the effects of late capitalist development and the growing commodification of social relations,¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ Another critic, Todd Gitlin (1995: 141), is similarly careful to distinguish the different stages in the rise of identity politics, suggesting a three-stage process: 'first, the discovery of common experience and interests; next, an uprising against a society that had imposed inferior status; finally, the inversion of that status, so that distinct qualities once pointed to as proof of inferiority were transvalued into the basis for positive distinction. It is only this third stage – where the group searches for and cultivates distinctive customs, qualities, lineages, ways of seeing, or, as they came to be known, "cultures" – that deserves to be called identity politics'.

¹⁶⁶ See Laclau (1990: 41-59) for an extended analysis of the relationship between dislocation and capitalism.

for Žižek, I argued, these same struggles serve to initially dislocate the capitalist system, before being domesticated as differences consistent with, even necessary for, the reproduction of that system. It is important to remember here the argument I made in chapter two regarding the concept of dislocation: for Laclau dislocations are generally understood as preceding social struggles. For Žižek, on the other hand, social struggles can themselves dislocate the social structure.

This means then that class struggle has a very different role for each author. For Laclau it is simply one of the plurality of antagonisms that defines the contemporary social field – having now been joined by others, putting its previously privileged position into question. For Žižek, on the other hand, class struggle retains its 'overdetermining' role. Clearly this focus on the importance of class is key, then, to the critique of multiculturalism, and it is one I have sought to apply here. As we have seen (and will see in more detail below), what Žižek's theory allows us to grasp is the process through which initially oppositional demands are taken up and moulded into a new ruling capitalist hegemonic project.

However here we reach a clear limit to this thesis in terms of the theoretical arguments underpinning it: the question of agency. How do classes become hegemonic agents? There are obvious parallels between some of the ideas I have sketched out and structuralist Marxism – in particular the idea of an interplay between systemic dislocations and the overdetermination or condensation of these into revolutionary ruptures that put the system itself into question. This is not surprising, of course, as Althusser is a key reference point for Žižek.¹⁶⁷ However, while Althusser maintained an orthodox Marxist stress on economic determination 'in the last instance', Žižek has not – at least not explicitly. This I have followed by drawing a parallel with Laclau's theory of discourse in order to think through the place of the economic in Žižek's thought, stressing the importance, for the latter, of the commodity-form and its structuring role in relation to all social activity, not just the production of goods and services. However, while structural Marxists are able to theorise classes as

¹⁶⁷ Alex Callinicos (2001: 373) has described Žižek's work as operating at the 'confluence' of four discourses: film criticism, German idealism, Lacanian psychoanalysis and Althusserian Marxism.

stemming from positions within the relations of production, it is not clear (to me at least) how understanding the commodity-form as a 'socio-transcendental a priori' (Zizek, 2006: 56) enables a class schema to be generated. This, in turn, makes the question posed above – how to understand classes as hegemonic agents – a difficult one.

It is worth noting that in my *empirical* account of the rise of equality and diversity I have located a number of different actors involved in this development: the state – through the activities of local councils and government departments; political parties – especially the Labour Party; civil society organisations generally; we might also mention individuals such as Rachel Ross and Robin Schneider, whose book, *From Equality to Diversity*, appeared to play a particularly important role in bringing US-style diversity management to the UK. However, as I say, I have not been able to provide a *theory* of agency to accompany this empirical data. This is a task that I envisage taking up more fully in future research and I will finish this section with some thoughts on the direction that I would see this research taking.

There are two questions here. One is how we understand classes, and the second is how we understand classes as hegemonic agents. One direction that I have pointed to in relation to the first question is to see classes (the working class, more specifically) as constituted first and foremost by relations of *inequality*, rather than by relations of production. If dislocatory struggles – those that challenge the many, varied relations of inequality in society – threaten the formal equality that tends to define capitalist societies, class struggle can be understood as a response to this situation by providing an identity based on a *different* type of unequal relation: one that condenses these different inequalities into a single, exploitative class relation. In this sense, the Marxist idea of the 'relations of production' is the result of a political, hegemonic construction, rather than one that provides the underlying basis of social struggles.

In relation to the question of a ruling hegemonic class, Balibar has argued for the *constitutive* role played by the state. In a useful contribution to a co-

authored book with Immanuel Wallerstein, *Race, Nation, Class*, he has argued, drawing on Gramsci, that the

bourgeois [i.e. hegemonic] class does not take over state power *after* being constituted as the economically dominant class but, on the contrary, that it becomes economically dominant (as well as socially and culturally) to the extent that it develops, utilizes and controls the state apparatus, and undergoes a process of transformation and diversification in order to achieve this...In the strict sense, then, there is no such thing as the "capitalist class"; only capitalists of different types...who form a class only on condition that, to an ever increasing extent, they unite with *other* social groups who are apparently outside the "basic social relation": intellectuals, civil servants, managers, landowners (Balibar, 1991: 172)

Again, the economic class within the 'basic social relation' is constituted as a *result* of hegemonic activity. Here, the 'state apparatus' is at the heart of the interaction of a number of different groups, helping to coordinate and reproduce the capitalist social order. The 'intellectuals, civil servants [and] managers' that I have shown to be involved – through my case study organisations – in the promotion of equality and diversity could therefore be understood as playing a key hegemonic role in this way. However, this would require more empirical data to establish a fuller picture of this hegemonic activity, alongside the theoretical work obviously needed to expand on the thoughts offered here.

9.2 Integrating Equality Policies: Business and the Law

I've suggested above that the idea of difference at the heart of multiculturalism can be usefully linked to the 'differential absorption of demands' in response to dislocatory conflicts, such as those that arose in the first half of the 1980s. Over the next few decades there are, of course, many developments linking these early multicultural experiments to the present day and it's worth remembering that I have not attempted to provide a comprehensive empirical description of this process. My focus in this thesis has been on tracing the relationship between equality and diversity as an ideological framework, and equality and diversity as a particular type of multicultural policy aiming to equalise the conditions among various social groups.

In chapters five and six I focus on the relationship between the equality and diversity framework and two particular developments: the rise of a corporate take on equal opportunities (diversity management) and the changing nature of equalities legislation. Overall, the different features that I describe clearly fit within the overall narrative of integration that I have proposed above. However, so far in this chapter this process has been cast in terms of integrating *groups* – i.e. differentially absorbing the demands of ethnic minority communities. By contrast, in chapters five and six we see the integration of a particular kind of redistributive *policy* (as defined above) considered necessary to absorb those demands. In other words, what emerges from the chapters in question is a process through which, from an initial situation of conflict in relation to these policies, the latter are made compatible with, and given a permanent place within, society – at least that is the aim.

The best evidence of this process emerges from the Schneider-Ross discourse. Here we see that by the end of the 1980s significant obstacles appear to stand in the way of equal opportunities. The central problem is that while, as we have seen, the more radical equality policies involve measures that treat individuals differently on the basis of group identity, overriding the principle of formal non-discrimination among individuals, these measures are seen by an increasingly vocal opposition (led, particularly, by the right-wing media) to lack a universal, moral and non-political foundation. In simpler terms, the promotion of the group over the individual is seen as an illegitimate use of state power to push a partisan agenda.¹⁶⁸ At the same time there is, despite such opposition, a clearly felt need for such policies.

The answer to this dilemma involves various measures to integrate these controversial policies: this means continuing to implement the substance of the policy, while, at the same time, adjusting the relationship between that policy and wider society in order for the former to be accepted by the latter. The 'business case' is a good example of this. As we have seen, it involves putting the rationale for equality policies in terms that will appeal to key decision-

¹⁶⁸ 'We know...that imposed change is likely to be resisted and causes a "backlash"' (Ross and Schneider, 1992: 50).

makers in charge of the workplace (i.e. managers and directors). Similarly, in both chapters we saw the idea of embedding or 'mainstreaming' equality policies in organisations; this helps to create the institutional conditions for those policies to operate unproblematically via a focus on cultural change and the creation of a legal framework in which organisations are obliged to tackle inequalities, not just respond to complaints of discrimination. Even the consolidation and streamlining of legislation in this area can be understood in terms of this broader process: creating a rationalised, unified legal framework helps to strengthen the place of this kind of legislation in the wider legal system, moving equalities law away from its fragmentary, 'ad-hoc' character. Furthermore, the overall trend captured is one of not only integration but also expansion, as the equality and diversity framework develops beyond its roots in local, specifically racial, politics – a good example, as I've suggested, of a move from a 'myth' to a 'social imaginary'.

As I've also argued, the concept of diversity is central to this process; however, what is the precise role played by this concept? As this question stands at the centre of this thesis it's worth looking at in some detail. In the simplest terms, diversity changes the rationale for group-based equality policies: the differential treatment required for this kind of policy is justified in terms of incorporating different kinds of people, and the benefits that these differences can bring, rather than in terms of making society more equal. The idea is that if you want to, say, increase the number of women in banking (to take an example from chapter four), and it is clear that some kind of substantive action will be needed to do this (i.e. simply enforcing formal anti-discrimination measures will not be enough), this action will be best 'sold' through arguing that women can bring with them, if not stereotypical female qualities such as an aversion to risk-taking, certain 'life-experiences' that can benefit the companies concerned. This way of justifying the policy will be more successful, so the argument goes, than putting forward equality between men and women as the reason.

Why would this different rationale be more successful? The argument from Schneider-Ross is that the diversity-rationale helps to depoliticise these policies, and by depoliticising them they become less controversial and therefore more likely to be accepted. This is how we might understand the

stress on an individualised understanding of difference that we found in both chapters. The idea is that diversity helps to remove equality policies from the contested domain of group-based struggles over racial and other types of inequality, and focuses instead on the different qualities that each individual can contribute. There are two further, related advantages that this new rationale brings: 1) once the argument is put in terms of diversity, we can also talk about individuals being composed of a wide variety of differences, and not just the more politicised and intractable differences of race and gender; 2) it also enables an emphasis on the universal nature of equality policies. Once a policy is framed in terms of the unique difference an individual can contribute, rather than a politically-conscious response to social injustice, it can be said to operate for the benefit of all, not just a particular minority. As Thomas (1990: 108) puts it, this helps create 'a work setting geared to the upward mobility of all kinds of people, including white males'.

There are, more specifically, two actors involved who are said to benefit from the move to a diversity approach. One is the decision-maker who, in implementing an equality policy under the diversity-rationale, is no longer taking a side in a conflict; they are instead making an apparently neutral decision based on the value of diversity – usually in terms of the economic or social benefits diversity is said to bring. The other actor said to benefit is the person who is on the receiving end of the policy: rather than the justification being that the group benefits 'through' them, so to speak (i.e. their promotion to the board of a company means that the group they represent is more equal in society), it is the individual that is being valued through having their unique differences recognised. This enables the individual, in theory at least, to feel more secure in relation to being treated differently, helping to avoid the accusations of 'tokenism' and favouritism that may accompany that treatment.

How does this focus on the depoliticisation or naturalisation of redistribution help explain the success of equality and diversity – and, by extension, multiculturalism – as an ideological phenomenon? To answer this we can ask a second question: who benefits? First of all, minorities materially benefit from redistributive policies (even if in a very limited sense – a point I return to below)

and this helps to bind those communities to the ideological framework used to justify those policies. As Malik (2009: 69) explains:

Imagine that you are a secular Bangladeshi living in a run-down area of Birmingham. You don't think of yourself as a Muslim, you may not even think of yourself as Bangladeshi. But you want a new community centre in your area. It is difficult to get the council's attention by insisting that your area is poor or disadvantaged. But if you were to say that the Muslim community is deprived or lacking, then council coffers suddenly open up – not because the council is particularly inclined to help Muslims, but because being 'Muslim', unlike being 'poor' or 'disadvantaged', registers in the bureaucratic mind as an authentic identity. Over time, you come to see yourself as a Muslim and a Bangladeshi, not just because those identities provide you with access to power, influence and resources, but also because those identities have come to possess a social reality through receiving constant confirmation and affirmation. It is how you are seen, so it is how you come to see yourself.

The opposition that Malik draws in the previous passage I have cited (ibid: 67), between the needs of communities and the imposition of identities, is here replaced with a more subtle explanation of how, through meeting material needs, diverse (i.e. differentiated) identities come to be more accepted by individuals and reproduced over time.

The particular idea of redistribution that I've identified in the previous chapters goes deeper than the process Malik describes though. While the provision of economic resources, such as a local community centre, may help in explaining the success of multicultural ideas among particular minority communities, it does not explain the success it has had across society more generally. This is where the findings from this thesis can help: the redistributive policies that I've highlighted link material gains on the part of minority communities to a notion of substantive equality – positive action policies, for example, help not only individuals from minority communities, they also help to rectify larger inequalities across society by bringing disadvantaged groups level with comparatively advantaged ones. The significance of this is that it represents a solution to an obvious problem about a contemporary capitalist society such as Britain (as mentioned in chapter two): that while there is widespread acceptance

of the idea that citizens should be thought of as equal, they nonetheless continue to live very obviously unequal lives. As Žižek (1999: 203) has put it:

the post-political liberal establishment not only fully acknowledges the gap between mere formal equality and its actualization/implementation, it not only acknowledges the exclusionary logic of 'false' ideological universality; it even actively fights it by applying to it a vast legal-psychological-sociological network of measures, from identifying the specific problems of every group and subgroup...up to proposing a set of measures ('affirmative action', etc.) to rectify the wrong.

In this sense, then, equality and diversity offers not just material gains for some, but also the idea that the failure of the system, and its promise of equality for all, is being corrected – that something is being done for the disadvantaged over-and-above the very limited right to formal equality. This ultimately helps to add legitimacy to the system by appearing to be a promise of justice for those that lose out.

As I've argued (along with many critics) this is an extremely limited form of redistribution however, one that aims to make non-class groups more equal in society while leaving class and socio-economic inequalities largely intact. While there are material gains for minority communities then, as I've said, these tend to accentuate and reproduce inequalities within these communities by benefiting some but by no means all. With this in mind, we can explain the attraction of the equality and diversity framework by the fact that it manages to bring together *three* important elements: a limited accommodation of material interests, an idea of substantive equality that patches up the failures of the system, and a compatibility with historically high levels of socio-economic inequality. These three elements help to explain why equality and diversity appeals to more than just members of minority communities, as well as local council officers dealing with social disorder. There is a much broader idea of social justice on offer, capable of appealing to ethical sensibilities as well as political practicalities, but without threatening entrenched material interests.

The redistributive aspect of equality and diversity is also key to understanding its specificity as an ideology of difference.¹⁶⁹ It is not just the link with liberal-democratic ideas that is novel, then, there is also an obvious connection with social-democratic ideas, and the latter connection explains why equality and diversity has been successful among the Left particularly. This is a point I expand upon in the following section, but we can add here that what Žižek describes as a feature of the 'post-political liberal establishment' (meaning the era of neoliberal multiculturalism) need not be thought of as historically unique. Rather we can think of post-war social democracy as a similar response to the failure of the system to guarantee equality for its citizens, as a regime that also acknowledged the gap between a 'mere formal equality and its actualization/implementation'. The difference of course lies in the disadvantaged group that embodies this gap: the working class is replaced by the identity-based groups of multiculturalism.

There are two further ways in which I have sought, in this thesis, to expand on Žižek's understanding of equality and diversity (and, by extension, multiculturalism) as a way of bridging the gap between the formal equality promised by the system and the reality of inequality in society: 1) a detailed empirical analysis of the discourse behind the 'vast legal-psychological-sociological network of measures' that Žižek mentions, as these measures have developed in Britain over the last 30 years or so; 2) the specific role that the diversity-rationale plays in helping to depoliticise this 'network of measures', and the more general attempt, which I have traced in this thesis, to integrate these ideas into the day-to-day running of society. As I have argued, while we can explain why the limited redistribution that equality and diversity offers might

¹⁶⁹ I should mention here that Žižek's idea of ideology as a 'displacement' of class struggle is undoubtedly an interesting and potentially useful theory, and Žižek (2000a: 97) has himself applied it to multiculturalism. I have not used it here though as I have wanted to focus on the specificity of equality and diversity as an ideological phenomenon, and the idea of the displacement of class struggle is a more general one that applies as much to Nazi Germany as multiculturalism (see, for example, Žižek's analysis of the former, 2005). Hasan (2010: 212-24) has also offered an interesting contribution to the understanding of ideology, relating specifically to multiculturalism: 'white liberal post-colonial guilt'. The argument is that white liberals have, through guilt about past colonial domination, been unwilling to criticise ethnic minority cultural practices or claims to cultural difference more generally. However, there are, it seems to me, two fairly obvious limitations in using this idea to explain the hold of multiculturalism as an ideology: 1) it focuses on only one group in society, white liberals, and is not applicable to other groups who have accepted multicultural ideas (such as ethnic minorities themselves); 2) as a psychological explanation it fails to link subjectivity with broader material and social conditions (as I have tried to do here).

make the ideas attractive to some, we also need to pay attention to the way in which this redistribution has been made more compatible with those in society who do not find the idea of a more substantive equality ideologically attractive – those such as the business leaders that Schneider-Ross sought to win over in the early 1990s by 'rebranding' equal opportunities in terms of the business benefits offered by diversity.

There is, in other words, an important distinction here between the content (the policies) and the form they are presented in (the diversity-rationale) – a distinction that is often not made in the literature.¹⁷⁰ In order to grasp the novelty and specificity of equality and diversity it is important to think through the way in which the form and content combine. If, for example, we take only the diversity-rationale – that workplaces need to value and incorporate different types of people – while this may do nothing for inequality, and could be critiqued on that basis, it is also difficult to see why it would be controversial. As we saw in chapter five, colleges in the United States had a long tradition of taking geographical diversity into account before diversity was used as a defence of affirmative action, yet these policies did not generate the kind of controversy that the contemporary idea of diversity has.¹⁷¹ At the same time, while equality

¹⁷⁰ The recognition/redistribution debate, which often provides the terminology for discussion around these issues, tends to be structured around a distinction between recognition and redistribution as two types of injustice: whether this distinction is justified (Fraser, 1995), problematic in relation to sexuality (Butler, 1997) or class (Bernans, 2002), or wrong in that redistribution can be reduced to recognition (Honneth, in Fraser and Honneth, 2003) or vice-versa (Barry, see discussion below). Anderson's contribution to the debate is a useful exception to this, pointing to the specificity of the diversity-rationale as involving a distinction between redistribution and recognition, but overlaid with a further distinction between a type of injustice and a way of justifying or rationalising a response to that injustice. She provides a useful summary of why it is wrong to think that the 'diversity' remedy ignores the question of distribution: '[f]irst, whether affirmative action is rationalized by redistributive or recognitional rationales, it has first-order redistributive effects: it gives disadvantaged racial groups access to elite education, and to the networks of connections that lead to elite careers upon graduation. Second, mainstream multiculturalism's advocacy of race as a dimension of merit has helped to transform American business culture, which now to a surprising extent embraces "diversity" as a productivity-enhancing feature of organizations rather than as a demand for justice... This has the second-order redistributive effect of shifting criteria of merit to favor disadvantaged racial groups, while defusing backlash misrecognition. Thus, redistribution gets a free ride on an overtly recognitional remedy' (Anderson, 2008: 165).

¹⁷¹ Similarly, while no doubt more controversial than this example, it could be argued that the kind of policies for which multiculturalism is perhaps best known – adapting national customs to incorporate minority cultures (e.g. providing for minority dietary requirements in schools or the workplace, celebrating minority religious festivals, and so on) – has been much less controversial than the redistributive policies I have focused on in this thesis. For example, Tiryakian (2004: 10) argues that the former 'sort of adjustment...has been made with relative ease'; in contrast, it is only

polices before the diversity-rationale were controversial (as we have seen this appears to be the reason for the rise of diversity in the first place), the justification used is social equality in response to a historically specific injustice (i.e. racism or sexism). The resulting conflicts surrounding the issue are, then, likely to put this principle (the idea of equality for a disadvantaged group) into question, rather than race or sex as distinct identities or lifestyles.

In a similar fashion, I would argue that it is this combination of a diversity-defence and an underlying redistributive policy that is a crucial factor in why, despite the rhetoric of individualism, individuals can become more rather than less trapped within reified identity categories as a result of diversity (a common criticism of diversity that we have seen in a number of different forms throughout this thesis). On the one hand, the idea that diversity is about individuality is belied by the redistributive nature of the policies carried out in its name. Redistribution is not about multiplicity, variety and so on, but is rather about equalising, or at least narrowing the gap between, a disadvantaged group and a comparatively advantaged group in relation to resources or opportunities of some kind. Clearly redistribution, in this sense, requires broadly defined, disadvantaged groups (women, ethnic minorities, the disabled and so on) and a broadly defined majority group (men, white-British, able-bodied and so on) in order to measure inequality and any progress towards its amelioration. Importantly, individuals here can count only as members of a group and are treated as such. Redistribution between social groups, by its very nature, cannot take into account the kind of multifaceted, intersecting inequalities that constitute an individual's actual identity.¹⁷² On the other hand, it is only when diversity is used to justify this redistribution that this categorisation of individuals becomes, as we have seen, a permanent, rather than temporary, feature of society.¹⁷³

when 'demands that call for significant economic and political resources' are made that 'cultural nationalism receives serious opposition'.

¹⁷² This point helps to explain some of the moments of instability that I have highlighted in the case studies, and the balancing act that results between the promotion of substantive equality and its diversity guise.

¹⁷³ The same argument can be made in relation to the diversity-based promise of 'upward mobility' for all groups. In fact, only the disadvantaged will be helped, in order to bring them level with the relatively advantaged. At the same time, the *idea* that all groups are helped obviously serves to make this arrangement permanent. If all groups stand to gain then why would you stop? It should be added that, of course, the older (pre-diversity) equality-rationale can appeal to a kind of enlightened self-interest: the idea that everyone ultimately gains from equality between groups – in terms of a lack of

This distinction – between redistributive equality policies and the way that those policies are justified – is also important if we move on to consider the critique of equality and diversity. Žižek's argument that I've just cited – that equality and diversity represents a 'post-political' solution to inequality that is content to adjust outcomes for minority groups while leaving the overall capitalist framework intact – applies to the measures themselves, rather than the way those measures are justified. This is also the case for Walter Benn Michaels – whose work I've cited at a number of points in this thesis. Michaels argues that these policies simply aim to correct 'horizontal' inequalities between men and women, white and ethnic minority, at the expense of class or economic inequality.¹⁷⁴ Affirmative action and other, similar policies simply offer a 'zero-sum game' (Michaels, 2010) that aims to share huge inequalities within society equally among black and white, men and women. While *The Trouble With Diversity* (Michaels, 2006) offers an interesting and perceptive account of the way that diversity rationalises affirmative action, and the specific consequences that this rationale brings, for Michaels the original policy and the later diversity-rationale are equally problematic.

This can be contrasted with the less radical critique that comes from within the equality and diversity agenda itself. Of my case studies, the TUC was the best example of this – this was to be expected, perhaps, given the organisation's left-wing origins. Here the main problem is the new diversity-rationale rather than the policy: diversity, and associated ideas such as the 'business case', are a danger to what is otherwise a progressive equality agenda. The depoliticisation and individualisation of the issue of inequality, that is for Schneider-Ross a positive effect of diversity, is, for these voices, its central danger.¹⁷⁵

social conflict, for example. However, this is different from the idea that all groups are actually helped by the policies themselves; rather, with the equality-rationale it is transparent that some groups are to be helped in the short term in order for all to gain in the long term.

¹⁷⁴ Michaels treats these two terms (class and economic inequality) as entirely synonymous, which is, for me, a significant failing of *The Trouble with Diversity*. While he does admit towards the end of this book that 'accounts of class ought to be more sophisticated than mere facts about wealth and income' (Michaels, 2006: 202), he does not appear to (in this book or, as far as I know, elsewhere) take this advice.

¹⁷⁵ It is worth repeating the point I made in chapter five that these concerns about the impact of diversity on equal opportunities is a relatively widespread, mainstream phenomenon and, by no means, the exclusive property of the political fringes. This is perhaps the reason why, despite the fact

We can perhaps add an additional angle here that develops this critique:¹⁷⁶ this is the question of what is lost with a switch to a diversity-rationale even if the redistributive policies themselves remain, and even if, as I have argued, the latter actually become more deeply embedded in society. By no longer using equality as a justification for social action, the idea becomes further removed from the public realm at a time when it is needed more than ever to challenge the high levels of inequality that exist in British society. By accepting, say, the business case argument for equal opportunity policies, you accept not just a different way of achieving the same goal, you also accept the logic that social policies should at all times be adjusted to fit with the demands of business – a logic that, if allowed to go unchallenged, may do far more damage in the long-run than turning away the chance to have equality policies 'mainstreamed' into the corporate environment. This, of course, is unlikely to worry those, such as Schneider-Ross, whose goal is limited to the smooth running of organisations. However, it should worry, and therefore be challenged by, those who have more progressive political concerns. As Zizek (2012) himself has argued recently: '[t]rue victory over your enemy occurs when they start to use your language, so that your ideas form the foundation of the entire field'.

My own view is that we need a position somewhere in between the two critiques that I have outlined. It would seem mistaken to reject out of hand any non-class redistributive measures. There are surely specific times and places where it can be justified – I think Michaels is wrong therefore to completely oppose, in the way that he does, this kind of identity-based equality with social equality. In this sense, then, the problem is the diversity-rationale: as I've argued in the previous paragraph, it represents a fundamental acceptance of powerful established interests by seeking to adapt an agenda to the language and influence of the latter rather than using that agenda to challenge their position. It is also a dangerous game to be playing: by disingenuously 'selling' controversial equality policies in terms of valuing distinct identities and lifestyles the whole debate

that Schneider-Ross argue for a move 'from equality *to* diversity', the reference to equality has not, in fact, been eliminated and retains its place alongside diversity (i.e. the 'equality *and* diversity agenda' is generally a more common term than just 'diversity agenda'). As I've shown in the case studies, there is primarily an attempt to balance the two concepts rather than replace one with the other.

¹⁷⁶ I am grateful to Alex Callinicos for providing me with this additional angle.

around these policies becomes distorted, and the original reasons for the policies becomes lost. What began as a response to a historically specific injustice, such as, say, sexism, becomes an exercise in the permanent valuing of supposedly unique feminine qualities. This invariably leads to the politicisation of these differences, such that opposition to, say, positive action becomes rationalised through a negation, rather than affirmation, of the value of difference.¹⁷⁷ In other words, the diversity-rationale leads to a distortion of the politics of inequality that undoubtedly makes a rational, progressive intervention more difficult.

However, at the same time, Michaels is surely right to point to the limitations of the policies themselves. In essence, the central aim behind these policies is simply to establish a middle-class that is less white, male, able-bodied and so on. If this aim is accepted without criticism political horizons become limited and a broader critique of class society will be lost. As Žižek has argued so forcefully over the last 20 years or so, politics should be about more than just what is possible (i.e. trying to correct inequalities within a particular set of social relations through the gradual adjustment of material outcomes): 'the political act (intervention) proper is not simply something that works well within the framework of the existing relations, but something that *changes the very framework that determines how things work*'. What Žižek calls 'authentic politics' should be understood as the 'art of the impossible – it changes the very parameters of what is considered "possible" in the existing constellation' (Žižek, 1999: 199 – emphasis removed from the second quote). In relation to equality and diversity, then, this means being prepared to go further than critiques of the diversity-rationale alone, and instead question the long-term viability of, and highlight the contradictions that will inevitably result from, any attempt to equalise social groups within a highly unequal social structure.

¹⁷⁷ Further research would be useful here to see if empirical evidence could be found to support this argument. This would involve an investigation of 'backlash' phenomena to see if the shift to a diversity-rationale has indeed changed the form that opposition to equality policies has taken. As is the case in much of the literature, Roger Hewitt's study (2005) of the emergence of a critique of anti-racist policies in south-east London, while useful, does not clearly distinguish between the different rationales given for equality policies, and therefore is not able to highlight the effect that diversity may have had.

9.3 Class and Integration

My central aim in chapters seven and eight was to add further detail to my overall argument, building on both its empirical and conceptual dimensions. In chapter seven my focus was on the question of class and socio-economic inequality and, as we saw, the two case studies used for this chapter divided quite neatly in relation to these two terms. The TUC gave us a useful look at the impact of diversity on a class-based equality discourse. Here we saw the declining importance of class struggle and working-class identity in relation to the issue of inequality, which, given the well-documented decline of class, was unsurprising. Important here are not only the social changes underlying this decline (some of which I highlighted in chapter three), but also the strategic decision by trade unions to adjust to a changing official discourse.

With this in mind, while we saw some evidence of a struggle over the concept, I would emphasise the generally widespread acceptance of diversity within the TUC discourse. In terms of drawing a picture of the rise of diversity across society, this is a useful addition to the corporate and governmental take on the concept seen in previous chapters. It is also worth remembering, as mentioned above, that the criticisms of equality and diversity that I did find do not attack the policies themselves, only diversity as a rationale. More specifically, I couldn't find in any of the TUC texts, or in the articles I cited on trade unions and equality, evidence of any disquiet over the non-class nature of the groups that are helped by this type of policy, or, in a related sense, that class was in danger of losing out to these other inequalities. This is surprising, perhaps, given the class-based nature of the organisation.

This argument – that diversity, and multiculturalism more generally, leads to the neglect of class – is a familiar one in the literature.¹⁷⁸ While not dealing with the issue of class specifically, Barry has also made a related argument that the politics of recognition is a threat to redistributive struggles, with detrimental consequences. More specifically, he argues that the recognition of difference is not a distinct type of injustice that comes to replace distributive concerns, but

¹⁷⁸ Alongside those already cited – such as Michaels (2006), Sivanandan (1990) and Zizek (2000a) – see Gimenez (2006).

rather that it acts as a different way of justifying much of the useful content of the 'distributive paradigm'. For example, Barry argues that Iris Marion Young unjustifiably reduces distribution to an economic notion that applies only to, using Young's words, 'wealth, income and other material goods'. Once this reductive definition is in place, very important elements of distributive justice of a 'nonmaterial' kind – rights, power, opportunities, and so on – seem to belong naturally to 'recognition'. For Barry, once many of these nonmaterial aspects of inequality are theoretically reclaimed for the distributive paradigm, there is little left of substance in the idea of 'recognition' to worry about; the 'affirmation' of a way of life – once disconnected from discrimination (direct and indirect), oppression, marginalization, socio-economic inequality and so on (all legitimate areas of distributive justice) – is perfectly acceptable as part of an individual's freedom of expression, but not a legitimate area of state intervention (Barry, 2001a: 271-4). The implication of all this is that the struggle for equality becomes fractured as equal access to these goods (rights, opportunities etc) becomes bound up with the valorisation of a distinct identity rather than the universal demand of equality for all (ibid: 325).

Barry's argument that theorists of recognition, such as Young, instigate a damaging split between social, 'nonmaterial' aspects of inequality (rights, opportunities etc) and economic aspects (wealth, income etc) is one I would fully concur with. As an argument, it also has obvious parallels with a central theme of this thesis: the separation within the equality and diversity framework between identity-based and socio-economic inequality. This theme was most closely explored in the second half of chapter seven: the social exclusion discourse undoubtedly gave us the best view of this distinction between the two types of inequality and the way in which it affects the nature of redistributive policies. Of particular interest were the different categories used to identify and respond to the two types of inequality.

It is worth mentioning here that, of course, any attempt to redistribute involves group categories of one kind or another and differential treatment on the basis of that category. Income brackets, for example, are categories necessary for a country's tax and benefits system that amounts to a modest form of redistribution. Clearly some categories carry greater social significance than

others however. While income boundaries capture relatively little about who people are and how they relate to others, the 'identity' categories of equality and diversity appear, in contrast, to capture more socially and politically relevant distinctions. Interestingly, while Barry (2001a: 114-6) points out problems with using identity categories to implement redistributive equality policies because of their tendency to cut across the reality of disadvantage (they include middle-class blacks and exclude poor whites), he also offers criticisms of the use of income categories for the purpose of redistribution. These criticisms include the fact that income is only one of a number of factors involved in material deprivation and therefore a poor surrogate for capturing the latter. He also notes that income levels tend to fluctuate from year to year and this would cause problems in the administration of affirmative action programs. Perhaps most interestingly, he argues that even if income was 'perfectly stable and a perfect surrogate for material deprivation, [it] would still suffer from the difficulty that it is a continuous variable. Any cut-off point would therefore leave children on either side of it with unequal prospects despite a difference of only one dollar in their parents' incomes' (ibid: 116).

In light of these criticisms it is interesting to see that the social exclusion discourse is presented by its advocates as a more sophisticated way of tackling disadvantage ('social exclusion is about more than income poverty...', SEU, 2004: 3). Of particular importance in doing this are geographical categories; the idea being that these capture, more adequately than income, the full range of material factors that constitute disadvantage (poor housing, high crime rates, unemployment and so on). However, as was illustrated in chapter eight, geography, just like income, can fail to accurately capture disadvantage leaving 'pockets of deprivation' outside the boundaries drawn. While it is perhaps less of a continuous variable than income then (i.e. we can talk in a more socially meaningful way about geographical areas than income brackets), geographical categories may nonetheless leave people arbitrarily on the wrong side of the boundary.

Clearly there are some big questions here regarding the relationship between inequality and the categories used in constructing policy responses to the problem. My focus in this thesis is more specific however and, as I've said, of

principal interest is the contrast between the use of geographical categories and the use of identity-based categories, such as race or ethnicity. This difference was most clear in relation to the different aims put forward in the report, *Jobs for All*: while both types of category define disadvantaged and unequal groups of people, the aim in relation to identity-based groups is to raise them, as a group, to an equal level with a comparatively advantaged group (e.g. White-British); in contrast, the more modest aim in relation to geographically-defined disadvantage is to *reduce* inequality to a certain point.

What defines the point at which inequality between areas becomes unacceptable? As we saw, the quantitative answer in the report was 50 per cent of the current gap. From a conceptual point of view, I suggested it can be understood as the point at which the inequalities that naturally accompany a 'dynamic economy' stop being consistent with individual autonomy, and instead trap the individuals concerned – we saw the metaphor of a 'cycle' used as a way of describing this idea. What is identified in the social exclusion discourse is a process in which inequality takes a social, and thereby illegitimate, form, giving rise to a group: the 'socially excluded'. Here geography obviously has a relevance that a category such as income lacks: it is one of the dimensions, alongside the generational link, in which disadvantage is transmitted – i.e. passed on to others.

One way of understanding the difference between the types of inequality I have identified is whether this process I've just described (through which disadvantage is transmitted between individuals) is treated as permanent or not. Tackling socio-economic inequality involves treating this process as temporary and reducing levels of inequality to the point where this transmission of disadvantage is avoided. One way of thinking about identity-based inequality is that, in contrast, this process is seen as irreversible. Equality must therefore take the form of lifting the group as a whole from its disadvantaged position, while respecting that group's distinct identity, rather than reducing levels of inequality to the point where this social category is dissolved.

This is simply another way of putting the assimilation/multiculturalism opposition, but in terms of inequality and its social effects rather than cultural

difference. As a way of understanding the rise of equality and diversity, it has the benefit of cutting across the redistribution/recognition distinction, which, as I've argued above, is clearly complicated by the existence of policies that do the former but are justified with reference to the latter. A redistributive policy such as affirmative or positive action can appear on either side of the distinction: it can be employed temporarily in order to reduce, say, racial inequality to the point at which the category is dissolved (the earlier equality/assimilationist rationale),¹⁷⁹ or it can be employed more permanently under the guise of the 'recognition' of a unique difference in society (the diversity/multiculturalist rationale).

This distinction can also be used to highlight some of the complexities of the place of class in contemporary equality and diversity discourse. As I have argued at a number of points in this thesis, one way of understanding the declining importance of the working-class in equality discourse is that, as a category, it does not fit into either type of inequality. This is most obviously the case in relation to identity-based inequality, as numerous authors have pointed out.¹⁸⁰ The common thread running through these arguments is that classes are *constituted* as unequal in a way that the various identity groups are not. Put extremely simply, it is possible to imagine men and women as equal (even if, in reality, they are not), but not the working-class and the middle-class – the latter pair are *defined* by their unequal position in relation to each other.

We can apply this argument more specifically to equality and diversity. While the working-class can be the subject of group-based redistributive policies and have their distinct 'lifestyle' recognised and celebrated, they cannot have this difference used as a way of justifying redistribution in the way that we have seen in the equality and diversity discourse. It obviously makes no sense to talk about the unique 'life experiences' (to use Fawcett's phrase) that working-class people can bring with them to enhance the workplace, such as banking or company boards, because the working-class is constituted as an identity, in part at least, in opposition to these positions of social privilege. In terms of the

¹⁷⁹ This would not necessarily mean the end of black, as a cultural category, as a form of identification that individuals freely pursue, but the end of racial distinctions as invidious social categories that imprison individuals and dictate their life chances (see Barry, 2001a: 70-1).

¹⁸⁰ Alongside Michaels (2006) and Eagleton (1996), see Sayer (2005: 14).

distinction I've made above, then, in order to benefit the working class this kind of redistribution must involve something of the assimilationist attempt to reverse the transmission of disadvantage between individuals within the disadvantaged group, by creating the conditions for talented individuals to leave the group and join the middle class. This is, of course, one way of characterising the post-war social-democratic response to inequality, before the advent of multiculturalism.

The much less examined area is how class inequality in pre-multicultural social democracy differed from the socio-economic inequality we see in equality and diversity texts. One hypothesis that emerges here is that working-class inequality had something of the permanence we now find embodied in the identity-based groups (women, ethnic minorities etc). In other words, what characterises older equality texts, such as we have seen in the Fawcett and TUC discourse, is that the working-class represents a disadvantaged social category that is to be *both* integrated as a difference, as a group with relatively strong social ties that are not to be completely dissolved through the reduction of inequality (unlike the socially excluded, for example), *and also* prevented from becoming a closed 'identity' through the creation of paths to enable individuals to escape that group and move up the social ladder.

I would emphasise that this argument, about the historical shift from a working class-centred equality discourse to a multicultural one, is intended as a hypothesis for future research and not a finding from the results presented in this thesis, due to the relatively small sample of texts I looked at from the period before the rise of equality and diversity.¹⁸¹ It follows Rex (2004) and Kymlicka

¹⁸¹ With this in mind, it's worth giving a more specific example of a question that could be raised in relation to this hypothesis: what are the points of tension and instability in the older social-democratic discourse and how do they compare with those I've highlighted in contemporary equality and diversity discourse? One possibility, based on an observation in Anthony Crosland's famous text, *The Future of Socialism*, is that social mobility designed to pull people out of the working-class may have clashed with the group-ties that are simultaneously accepted and maintained under corporatist arrangements. Crosland complains of the 'deep hostility, couched in the language of class betrayal ("he's gone over to the boss's side"), shown to the worker who takes a supervisory or managerial post, and the antagonism towards Trade Union leaders, previously trusted figures, who "go over" by becoming members of Nationalised Boards'. The contradiction is nicely captured by Crosland when he notes that this ideology (of class betrayal) is 'wholly inconsistent with the reiterated claims, often made by the very same class "patriots", that *more* managerial posts should be filled by workers, and *more* Trade Unionists be appointed to Nationalised Boards' (Crosland, 1956: 153-4). In contrast, this is obviously not a source of tension in relation to the promotion of social mobility for minorities, under the diversity-rationale, as these individuals do not lose their disadvantaged identity.

(1995: 179-81) in interpreting multiculturalism as a form of integration based on T. H. Marshall's post-war social citizenship model, which seeks to include disadvantaged groups within the polity.¹⁸² My difference with these authors is that, in my analysis, the working-class is excluded from the multicultural settlement rather than simply joined by other disadvantaged groups.

One way of capturing this idea theoretically would be to use the distinction I drew in chapter two between class struggle and dislocation in order to understand the difference between these two regulatory regimes (i.e. post-war social democracy and neoliberal multiculturalism). The hypothesis would be that in both regimes group-based inequality is recognised; however, in the case of post-war social democracy the inequality dealt with is embodied in class struggle, to the extent that social inequalities are condensed into a single disadvantaged group that is internal to the social structure: the working class. With neoliberal multiculturalism, in contrast, the inequality dealt with is better captured by the concept of dislocation. Here the inequality is embodied in a variety of disadvantaged groups understood to lie outside, or be excluded from, the mainstream social structure by virtue of this disadvantage.

I would argue then (or, more accurately, hypothesise) that the shift to neoliberal multiculturalism is not just a shift away from class, but a deeper shift towards the recognition of a different *type* of inequality altogether, one in which disadvantaged identities are treated as one among many manifestations of a highly heterogeneous and unstable social structure. This is a shift that is clearly captured in the thought of Laclau, and poststructuralism more generally. However, I would follow Žižek (2000a: 108) in arguing that this thought lacks a critical edge, that the 'plural contingency of postmodern political struggles and the totality of Capital are not opposed', and that 'today's capitalism...provides the very background and terrain for the emergence of shifting-dispersed-contingent-ironic-and so on, political subjectivities' (emphasis from second quote removed). I have sought in this thesis to try to elaborate on this idea, to

¹⁸² A very interesting paper by Jenny Williams also adds evidence to this argument, showing the similarity between educational policies designed to help ethnic minorities and those they replaced that were designed to help the working-class. Williams (1986: 135) argues that the former 'mirror very clearly the earlier, class based, definitions of problems, explanatory paradigms and policy recommendations'.

show the way in which multicultural redistributive policies operate on the basis of a separation of the social groups that are integrated, as beneficiaries of those policies, from the question of socio-economic inequality. In this sense, it is not simply that the working-class are excluded from contemporary equality discourse, it is that the very logic of the latter prevents them from being recognised as a group in the first place. Applying this to the broader social context, the idea that the working class have been 'demonized' (Jones, 2011) in recent times may be somewhat misleading, as it suggests that they have been recognised as a distinct group in the first place. The problem may go deeper: it may be *dissolution* rather than 'demonization' that more accurately captures the state of class relations in Britain today.

9.4 Conflict, Cohesion and Beyond

I've suggested above a way of explaining why the rise of diversity as a rationale for equality policies might lead to a hardening, rather than the desired softening, of group identities. The purpose of chapter eight was to show the impact that this kind of commonly-made criticism has had on equality and diversity discourse, and to highlight the solutions offered from within the discourse itself. In both case studies we found an emphasis on the need to provide a shared reference point – formal legal principles and 'thicker' cultural values respectively – that would help link distinct identities and therefore avoid conflict. While I've highlighted above the fact that the diversity-rationale presents equality policies as 'geared to the upward mobility of all kinds of people' (Thomas, 1990: 108), here the problem is how to unify these different 'kinds'. It is worth reiterating the significance of the timing here: both case study discourses emerged at the beginning of the 2000s, at the end of the period I've identified as an important time of growth in equality and diversity in Britain. It seems clear that, given this, cohesion is a response to conflicts surrounding this rise of equality and diversity in society, giving us three interlocking values at the core of the discourse I have been analysing.

I would argue, then, that the EDF is not just the result of the growth of the equality and diversity field during the 1990s – the kind of umbrella group that

often emerges out of any shared endeavour (the TUC being an obvious example of this in the trade union movement); it is also, at the same time, a response to a specific problem of conflict and competition within that field – this is, at least, part of the ongoing rationale for its existence. Organisationally, it provides a shared space for groups representing different interests and identities – this alone serves to bring together an otherwise fragmented field. However, as I explored in detail, there are also attempts by the EDF to provide more general solutions both at the practical and theoretical level.

As I pointed out, the human rights agenda has an important role in their thinking on this issue. Human rights provide a shared framework of rights and obligations that, for the EDF, all parties can sign up to, without giving up their particular identity and interests. As we saw, in order to play this role they have to be 'non-negotiable'; in this sense, human rights help provide a precise limit to group variation: no appeal to group differences in values can be made in order to defend practices that contravene these rights. This is, of course, a standard liberal response to conflict: the provision of a neutral space able to accommodate a plurality of conflicting views and interests.¹⁸³

The community cohesion discourse, for its part, offers something of a mid-way point between the critics of multiculturalism and the more uncritical (in relation to multiculturalism and diversity) liberalism of the EDF. Community cohesion offers something of an internal critique of multiculturalism: links are drawn between the latter and the phenomena of inter-group conflict in a much stronger, more explicit way than in the EDF discourse. However, multiculturalism is never directly named as the problem (the term is simply dropped), nor is the importance of equality and diversity ever challenged.

The emphasis on a shared British identity is, of course, the headline-grabbing feature of the community cohesion discourse, further distinguishing it from the EDF discourse. These shared values can be seen as an attempt to offer something more concrete than the formalism of universal human rights principles – though, as I showed, not too concrete so as to override legitimate cultural differences. There remains within the discourse not only a sensitivity to

¹⁸³ I am grateful to Alex Callinicos for making this point to me.

cultural diversity, but even, in places, a very strong affirmation of its importance. We could put this return to a nationalist discourse in Laclauian terms. I've suggested above that multiculturalism can be understood in relation to the production of a system of differences, or the 'differential absorption of demands', in response to conflict. The focus on cohesion can be understood, in contrast, as an attempt to construct a unified identity out of these differences – the construction of an 'equivalential chain'. For Laclau an equivalence is formed in order to exclude a threatening adversary: this fits the findings of chapter eight where we saw the need to oppose those elements that refuse the shared values offered – whether the 'non-negotiable floor' of human rights or fundamental British values. This process becomes more explicit with the growth, after the terrorist attacks in 2001 and 2005, of a government discourse on preventing extremism. 'Extremism' often refers, in this context, to radical Islamic movements, but right-wing nationalism – particularly the growth of the BNP (British National Party) over recent years – has also been the cause of concern (see Pitcher, 2006: 545-7).

We also saw, particularly in the community cohesion discourse, a concern with, what we might call, the blunt nature of equality policies. This picks up on the discussion above regarding the categories used to enact redistributive policies and the way in which these categories can fail to accurately capture the reality of inequality in society. Furthermore, and this is particularly a concern for the community cohesion literature, this failure can then generate resentment and conflict as disadvantaged people not included in the category lose out in the distribution of scarce resources. Though there was evidence that geographically-based approaches could be problematic in this regard, the most obvious concern here relates to ethnicity. More specifically, it is clear from the texts that disadvantaged white communities are of particular concern.

In the community cohesion discourse these communities embody a number of the problems that I have mentioned: a hardening of identity, a sense of exclusion from equality policies despite the obvious disadvantage of these communities, and the increasing popularity, in some of these areas, of the

BNP.¹⁸⁴ The problem for the equality and diversity agenda, as I've argued, is that the two social categories that define these communities – white-British and working-class – are not generally recognised within the framework for the purposes of redistribution: the former because it is an advantaged majority identity, the latter because it is a class identity (not an 'identity' category such as race or gender – as explained above). In response, alongside the increased attention to socio-economic inequality towards the end of New Labour's time in office, we saw calls within the community cohesion discourse to encourage the participation of these communities, for group representatives to be established that articulate the concerns of the 'white community' in a similar manner to ethnic-minority community 'leaders'.¹⁸⁵ This may seem surprising – and certainly I did not find recommendations of this sort elsewhere in the literature – but in reality it is simply an extension, to community politics, of Thomas' argument about the need to meet the interests of 'all kinds of people, including white males' (Thomas, 1990: 108). The question might be asked: if all communities are to be included, white as well as non-white, why continue with racial identifications at all? However, as I've argued in relation to diversity, cohesion-strategies are best seen as a way of justifying, of rationalising rather than replacing, identity-based redistribution, and the latter, by its very nature, requires the continued treatment of individuals according to their race.

While the change of government in 2010 provided a useful end-point for my investigations, it's worth briefly considering the impact of the coalition government and what the future may hold more generally. Two things can be said with a degree of certainty. Firstly, whatever impact Labour's renewed attention to socio-economic inequality may have had in the short-term for disadvantaged areas, the fall-out from the global financial crisis and consequent austerity program pursued by the successor government will surely serve to entrench already high levels of inequality. At the same time, large cuts in public

¹⁸⁴ See Ford and Goodwin (2010) for a detailed analysis of BNP support.

¹⁸⁵ The need to establish links between these communities and the state is well brought-out in the title of a Labour government program, initiated in 2009: 'Connecting Communities'. This program cost £12 million and explicitly targeted disadvantaged white areas in order to 'connect with resentful white working-class communities in 130 wards across England and undercut rightwing extremism' (*Guardian*, 2009).

expenditure make the kind of social policy measures pursued by Labour throughout their time in office much less likely.¹⁸⁶

In contrast, I don't think the general developments I've charted in equality and diversity will be particularly affected by the change of government. It is true that when it comes to specific conflicts of interest between business and the equality and diversity agenda – say, in relation to whether equal pay audits should be mandatory – the coalition may be more likely to side with the former (though, as I noted in chapter six, the New Labour government was hardly hostile to business interests). Nevertheless, the deep-rooted nature of the developments I've described, as seen through the eyes of my case study organisations, should not be underestimated. To repeat my central argument: equality policies that aim to redistribute resources and opportunities in order to bring social groups level to one another have not been rejected in favour of diversity and cohesion; rather, the latter two ideas have been crucial in integrating the former. The representation of these policies as a means of recognising and valuing a range of distinct, yet unified, identities has undoubtedly helped to embed them in a hostile social body. So while policies that aim to rectify class inequality will no doubt continue to be proposed,¹⁸⁷ a key argument of this thesis is that these policies will not and, indeed, cannot be *integrated* into society while the equality and diversity framework that I have described remains in place. Any class-based equality policies must remain peripheral, then, and prone to the exigencies of the situation and the party in government, rather than sown into the fabric of institutional practices in the way that identity-based measures are – as I have described in detail in this thesis.

I began by distinguishing between multiculturalism and the narrower domain of equality and diversity in order to specify the object of my analysis, I'll end by returning to the bigger picture. If what I have said is correct, while periodic

¹⁸⁶ 'As benefit cuts bite and real incomes fall, the unjust distribution of pain gets plainer for all to see. For all his speeches on social justice and social mobility, the thrust of Cameron policy is to make the country more unequal at an accelerating pace. By 2015, the IFS estimates, at least 500,000 more children will fall below the official poverty threshold: this compares badly with Labour who took a million out of poverty' (Toynbee and Walker, 2012).

¹⁸⁷ These may even include measures that recognise and seek to include the working-class as a specific social group, in an analogous sense to the identity-based groups of equality and diversity. Denis MacShane, for example, has recently suggested that political parties should reserve 10 per cent of their seats in parliament for the working-class (defined by MacShane as those on the minimum wage) (BBC, 2012).

criticisms of multiculturalism will no doubt continue to be voiced, the reality in Britain is that multiculturalism includes a deeply institutionalised use of identity in administering a limited, but nonetheless significant, form of redistribution, which no mainstream party will want to challenge. As I've said, from the point of view of minority groups there are some real, material gains to be made for a select few through enhanced chances for social mobility; for the middle-class and elites there is the sense that some, more substantive equality is being provided without actually impinging on their privileged class position. For the working-class however, particularly those that do not fall within the 'protected' identity categories, there is no (even limited) material gain. For this group, efforts to change the colour and gender of an unequal social order¹⁸⁸ must look like, and in my view ultimately are, an attempt to more firmly cement the subordinate social position of the working class.

Perhaps the more significant issue in the future, however, will not be the lack of challenge to the agenda from the mainstream parties, but the lack of challenge from left-wing parties outside the mainstream. Few have been willing to *politically* challenge multiculturalism from a progressive perspective,¹⁸⁹ linking its institutionalisation of identity categories, and associated consequences,¹⁹⁰ to the continuing neglect of the working class. The consequence of this is that the opposition to diversity (understood, it should be remembered, as a political rather than a social fact), which undoubtedly exists within working-class communities (and is, in my view, justified), has been articulated by the Right instead. The latter have done this by linking this opposition to the other significant identity-category that tends to conflict with multiculturalism: white-British.

¹⁸⁸ Gitlin (1995: 237) has written of the way in which multiculturalism 'struggles to change the color of inequality'.

¹⁸⁹ Though a very small party in size, the Independent Working Class Association (IWCA) are a notable exception here.

¹⁹⁰ While I have not had space here to discuss the empirical evidence behind the claim that multiculturalism leads to worsening community relations, I should add here that, in my view, this is correct. I would agree therefore with those critics of multiculturalism that have made this claim (e.g. Malik, 2009 and Hasan, 2010). I find it hard to understand how institutionalising differential treatment according to ethnic identity, especially in relation to scarce resources, would *not* lead to increased tensions between ethnic groups – even if there are, undoubtedly, other significant causal factors involved in explaining community dynamics. As I've argued, I believe that this conclusion is resisted by many – especially on the Left – because of the redistributive aim behind many multicultural policies.

There are then strategic, as well as normative reasons, for the Left to articulate a critique of multiculturalism. It looks likely that the combination of high levels of socio-economic inequality and the continued pursuit of equality and diversity will serve to sharpen the contradictions in those disadvantaged white communities most at odds with that agenda. As time goes on, the effect of the redistributive policies pursued will be to further narrow the inequalities between majority and minority, while inequality that cuts across those groups will remain high, thereby making the initial reason for those policies (inequality between majority and minority) less and less plausible. At the same time, the diversity-rationale for those policies, as I have suggested above, only serves to spread further confusion and tension among different identity-based groups. All this means that multiculturalism and diversity may represent an increasingly significant point of vulnerability of the ruling neoliberal ideology, particularly in those communities that the Left has traditionally targeted as a potential source of support. The key task then, for those on the Left, is not the production of more normative critiques of multiculturalism. Instead, the need is for the translation of those critiques into a concrete political strategy, a strategy capable of recapturing the concept of equality from those that aim to refine, rather than challenge, class society.

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